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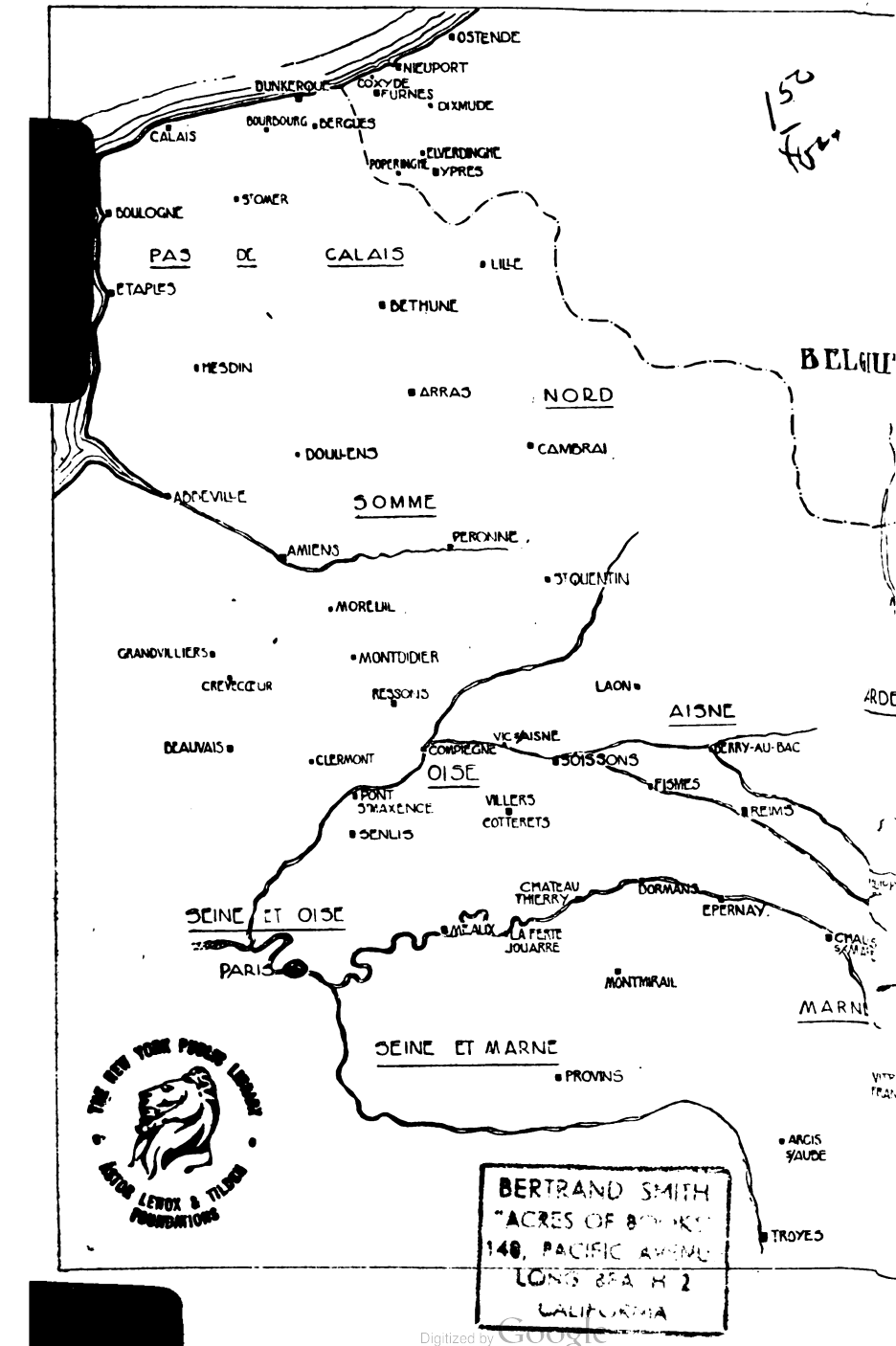

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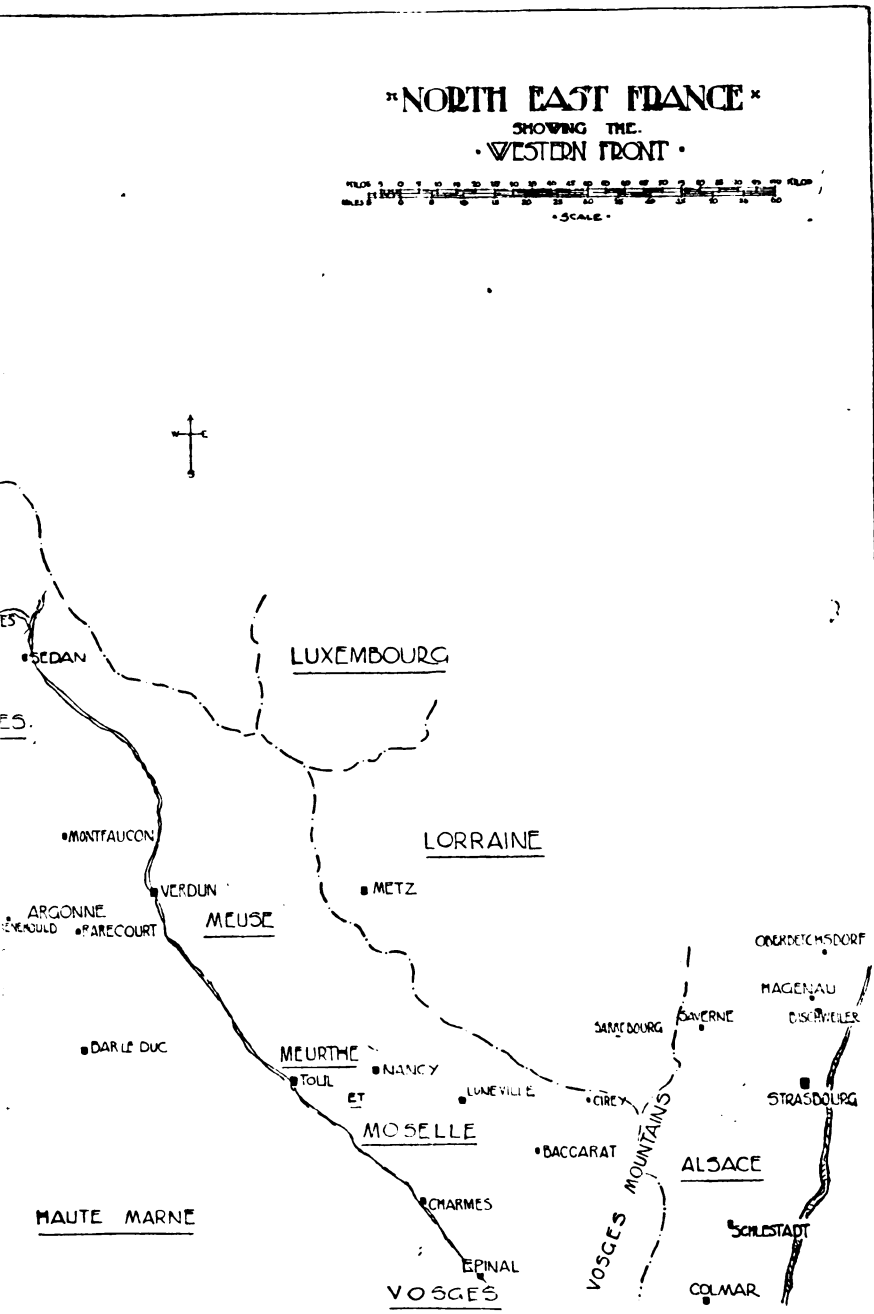

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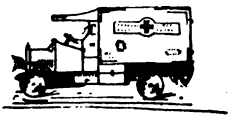
QUATORZE

1915 - 1919

An account of the activities in Belgium & Northern France of a Section of the Friends' Ambulance Unit.



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DOWN FROM THE FRONT. AUGUST 1918.

" . . . TOOK THE THINGS THAT ONCE WERE MEN,
"AND SPED THEM THROUGH THAT ZONE OF HATE."

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SECTION SANITAIRE ANGLAISE
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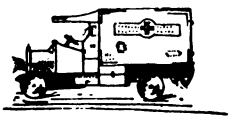

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Preface.

THE publication of this volume has been undertaken in response to the desire, expressed by many members of S.S.A. 14, that some record of the Convoy's wanderings should be compiled. It is primarily, therefore, to members of S.S.A. 14 that these remarks are addressed.

The Editors claim no literary or artistic merit for the book: but they venture to hope that as a plain, unvarnished account of the life of the convoy, the following pages may serve their purpose. Even with this limited aim before them, they found that the work of compilation entailed an amount of correspondence and an expenditure of energy that seem quite disproportionate to the results achieved: and the fact that this work has had to be done during off-hours and in the intervals of other occupations must be taken in extenuation both of the delay in going to press and of any faults (whether of commission or of omission) in the volume now published.

Finally the Editors wish to express their thanks to all members of the Convoy and others who have helped, either by the contribution of written matter or of photographs for inclusion in the book, or indirectly by supplying information or by undertaking the revision and correction of MSS.

H. LIDBETTER.
N. MONK-JONES.

September 30, 1919

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S.S.A. 14.

Alphabetical List of Convoy Members.

* Ardley, A. F. (Sheringham, Norfolk).
*†Ardley, B. (Sheringham, Norfolk).
*†Ardley, F. J. (Sheringham, Norfolk).
†Arnold, L. G. (Leiston, Suffolk).
Baker, C. J. (Kensington, W.).
†Barrow, R. M. [Chef-Adjoint March 1915—December 1917]. (Birmingham.)
*†Benson, L. E. (Manchester).
*†Bigland, R. A. (Chelsea, S.W.).
* Birkett, T. (Leicester).
* Bollam, E. S. (Poole, Dorset).
Brook, R. H. (Huddersfield).
* Brown, J. W. (Gloucester).
Burn, J. R. G. (Stockton-on-Tees).
Butler, W. H. (Southport).
†Carr, R. S. (Wolverhampton).
Carr, W. R. (Wigton, Cumberland).
Clark, H. G. (Darlington).
Coates, A. I. (Bradford).
†Colles, C. (Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, Ireland).
* Cooper, E. (York).
Cumberland, S. (Bentham),
Day, J. B. (Manchester).
*†Dyson P. E. (Huddersfield).
Edmonds, A. C. (Tunbridge Wells).
Emson, E. (Mildenhall, Suffolk).
Farrell, J. W. (Stockton-on-Tees) [Sergt. Mechanic.]
Fear, E. (Claremont, Cape Town, S. Africa).
Fenton, H. (Desborough, Market Harborough, Leicestershire).
Feugard, H. W. (Croydon, Surrey).
Gibson, H. (Barnsley).
Goddard, C. V. (Leicester).
†Greeves, J. (Belfast, Ireland).
†Greeves, W. E. [Sous-Chef December 1915—May 1916]. (Portadown, Co. Armagh, Ireland.)
*†Gripper, L. A. (Blackburn).
*†**Gripper, N. E.** (Blackburn).
Hamilton, A. S. (York).
Harding, S. H. (Uxbridge).
Harris, R. S. (Birmingham).
Hyde, G. N. (Leeds).
Jackson, A. (Settle, Yorks).
*†**Jackson, H. H.** (Kendal).
Jameson, A. (St. Helens, Lancs. & Tottenham, N.).
Jones, P. P. (Birmingham).
Kingdon, A. (Dunsford, Exeter).

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Alphabetical List of Convoy Members.

LEAN, O. B. (Sidcot, Somerset).
†LESTER, H. M. (Manchester).
* LEYLAND, J. T. [Sous-Chef August 1918—January 1919.] (Bainbridge, Askrigg, Yorks.)
LIDBETTER, H. (Cockermouth, Cumberland & Kensington, W.).
LOCK, H. W. (Islington, N.).
†MAY, E. S. (Colchester).
†MESSER, A. I. (Lemington-on-Tyne).
†**Messer, W.** (Lemington-on-Tyne).
MILTON, A. F. (New Cross, S.E.).
*†MILTON, H. E. [Sous-Chef December 1917—August 1918, Chef-Adjoint August 1918—January 1919.] (New Cross, S.E.)
MONK-JONES, N. (Upper Norwood, S.E.).
MORTIMER, E. (Manchester).
*†NEWBERY, A. E. (Reading).
*†PEARSON, A. [Sous-Chef April—December 1917, Chef-Adjoint December 1917—August 1918.] (Dublin, Ireland.)
†PIERCE, E. (York).
†PIM, S. (Mountmellick, Queen's County, Ireland).
RANSOME, E. O. (Pershore, Worcestershire & Dalton Hall, Manchester).
REDFERN, L. (Manchester).
ROBINSON, B. I. (Birmingham).
†ROWLANDS, H. (Bristol).
ROWLANDS, A. (Bristol).
ROWNTREE, J. S. (York).
* SCRIMGEOUR, R. W. (Dundee, Scotland).
†SIMMONDS, A. G. (Congresbury, Somerset).
SPENCE, R. L. (Portadown, Co. Armagh, Ireland).
†STANSFIELD, M. [Sous-Chef May 1916—April 1917]. (Blackburn.)
STAYNES, J. L. (Manchester).
†STURGE, P. D. (Bristol).
THORPE, J. W. (Sibford, Oxfordshire).
* TURVEY, N. (Birkenhead).
VINE, B. T. (Exmouth).
†WILLIAMS, W. E. (Swindon, Wilts) [Sergt. Mechanic.]
* WOOD, D. (Leeds).
WOOLLEY, A. H. (Bristol).
* YATES, R. P. (Golders Green, N.W.) [Sergt. Mechanic.]

NOTE.—In the compilation of this list, the official personnel returns, as shewn in a list published on December 30th, 1915, have been taken as a first basis, names which figure in that list being marked †. The original list of March 23rd, 1915, contains a miscellaneous collection of names which, although forming on paper the original membership, are in point of fact in no way representative of the convoy as it was actually constituted.

An asterisk indicates that a member has been awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for services rendered whilst working with the convoy.

The names of those who were killed whilst working with the convoy are printed in heavy type.

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Chapter I.

INTRODVCTORY

BEFORE embarking directly upon the history of S.S.A. 14, it may not be amiss to describe briefly how it was, in the first place, that British Motor Ambulance Convoys came to be working with the French Army: how the Friends' Ambulance Unit found itself engaged on this work: and more generally, how matters stood between these voluntary Red Cross Units and the French military authorities. To explain these points it will be necessary to cast our memories back to the first weeks of the War.

From the earliest days of August, 1914, it became known in England that the French Army was in great need of Motor Ambulances: and two hundred cars sent to Havre by the Automobile Association were soon followed by a number of Ambulance Units under the auspices of various societies or individuals. The British Ambulance Committee was in communication with the French military authorities as early as September, 1914, and by the end of that month the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John, helped by the Dennis Bailey Fund, had a convoy at work between Albert and Amiens. At that time a French doctor wrote saying that this had "greatly relieved our own (*i.e.*, French) convoys."

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When the Friends' Ambulance Unit arrived in France at the end of October (originally under the name of "1st Anglo-Belgian Field Ambulance Unit") it was not primarily intended to take up Motor Ambulance work, and the six ambulance cars were only added to the Unit's equipment as a sort of afterthought; yet it was the possession of these cars (presented by the B.R.C.S.) that subsequently opened up a whole new field of work, which indeed constituted, right up to the end of the War, one of the most important activities of the Unit.

It was on November 10th, 1914, at Wœsten, the *Quartier Général* of the medical service of the 87th French (Territorial) Division, that the first work of this kind was undertaken: the services of the F.A.U. were offered to this division and accepted, though without any official sanction. The intention had been to establish a dressing-station, but it was soon discovered that what the French chiefly needed was motor transport. The advent of the F.A.U. coincided with the end of the great outflanking movement and the holding of the Germans on the Yser line: so that this first handful of motor ambulances was kept very busy. Meanwhile the Hon. L. Holland offered the services of his unit to the VIIIth French army, and after some delay work was allotted, though not of a very exacting nature, the two chief stations being at Steenvoorde and Poperinghe. The F.A.U. then approached the Hon. L. Holland with a view to co-operation: hence it came about that the F.A.U. supplied the officers and the B.R.C.S. the drivers for a station at Poperinghe, and thus on December 2nd the first official motor ambulance work for the French Army was begun.

The official duties of the cars at "Pop" consisted in carrying out the rail-head work of the 9th and 32nd French Army Corps. But the F.A.U. had already learnt at Woesten how much work there was waiting to be done nearer the line: and it was realised that Divisional

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authorities, faced with the alternative of having practically no motor ambulances, were only too anxious to utilise the services of men and cars who could be relied upon to provide a rapid and efficient system of transport, even if their official status would not bear too close a scrutiny. Thus as the resources of the Unit grew, its sphere of action in this direction increased, along lines which, though quite unauthorised, were undeniably valuable and indeed necessary. In this way work was started at Dickebusch and Vandenbusch for the 31st and 32nd divisions at the beginning of December, and at Ypres for the 9th Corps, whose divisions (38th and 42nd) were in the salient. By the end of 1914 the F.A.U. ambulance-drivers felt that increasing reliance was being placed on their services: they had unexpectedly hit upon and developed work which suited them admirably and was a useful contribution towards filling the gaps in the French military organisation of the transport of wounded. Officially or unofficially, excellent relations had been established with the Medical Services of several Divisions or Army Corps. All the more bitter, therefore, was the set-back received on December 24th, when orders were received to the effect that the convoys at Dickebusch and Vandenbusch were to be withdrawn, followed by the termination shortly afterwards of all the rest of the F.A.U.'s divisional work. But keen as was the disappointment, the reasons for this step on the part of the French were obvious. The regular military formations had become adequately prepared to deal with the situation; simultaneously a lull had occurred in the fighting, and (as always happened in similar circumstances) discipline was stiffened, irregular developments that had sprung up to meet immediate needs were noticed and brought into line, and as rapidly as the Army machinery became able to cope with the work unaided, all unauthorised services, such as these F.A.U. outstations, were dispensed with.

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The responsibility for the work at Poperinghe (the one station that had been officially allotted to the Unit) remained; and there was a good deal of work for the other cars to do, for civilian activities were developed as the military work grew less.

But if the French Army authorities asked for the F.A.U. cars to be withdrawn, they made it clear that this was only because of their irregular position: indeed, they had noted the business-like manner in which these services had been rendered, and in February, 1915, negotiations were entered upon as a result of which the F.A.U. cars, together with those working under the Hon. L. Holland, were formed into the *Sections Sanitaires Anglaises*, Nos. 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15. Of these, S.S.A. 13 was staffed partially, and S.S.A. 14 entirely, by the F.A.U. Excepting S.S.A. 15 and the Parc, which were not confined to military work and were much larger than the others, these convoys consisted of eight ambulances: each section was to form an administrative unit on its own *(Unité Isolée)* and was to receive petrol and tyres from the French Army; the personnel was to draw army rations, with the option of exchanging these for an indemnity in money. The Hon. L. Holland was appointed inspector of the sections working in the north, and a French officer attached to the Quartier Général of the VIIIth French Army was charged with the administrative work arising in connection with the newly-formed sections.

It was on March 23rd, 1915, that S.S.A. 14 was officially formed under the new régime: the date marks the end of a period of sporadic and unco-ordinated activites behind the French lines in Belgium, arising out of the work of the "1st Anglo-Belgian Field Ambulance Unit." It is, therefore, from March, 1915, onwards that the story of the convoy's activities will be chronicled in the following pages; but before proceeding to this narrative, some further account of the development of

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convoy work and of the relations with the French Army authorities seems desirable.

For some time after the organisation of the convoys as *Sections Sanitaires*, their position in relation to the army organisation was still somewhat vague and irregular. In June all the B.R.C.S. personnel and many of their cars were withdrawn from the Dunkerque area: Sections 11 and 12 disappeared, and No. 13 was now (like No. 14) left entirely to the F.A.U. Indeed, during the first six months at Coxyde, and to some extent later, S.S.A. 14 was still regarded as little more than an outstation of the F.A.U., and depended for supplies not on the division to which it was attached (through which all rations should have been supplied) nor on the army Parc Automobile at Mardyck (which should have been responsible for the up-keep and repairs of the cars), bnt primarily on the F.A.U. head-quarters at Dunquerke. Towards the end of October, 1915, the F.A.U. received a visit from Capt. Dumenc and Lieut. Duboin, who under Commandant Girard at that time controlled the *Direction du Service Automobile* at G.Q.G.[1] As a result of this visit, the F.A.U. was asked to come in under a revised scheme for non-military units working at the front, and once more to re-organise its convoys. It was owing to the generosity of the B.R.C.S. that the F.A.U. was able to accept this offer.

During the latter half of 1915 S.S.A. 14 had been stationed at Coxyde, and cars from Sections 13 or 15 had frequently helped with the work officially allotted to No. 14. Five British Ambulance Committee convoys, with as many B.R.C.S. sections and one or two others organised by the British Committee of the Croix Rouge Française, had been working on various parts of the French front, on the Vosges Mountains, in Champagne and elsewhere. All these scattered convoys were now to be re-organised. Each section was to consist of twenty

[1] Grand Quartier Général.

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ambulances, with lorry, motor-cycle, kitchen and workshop cars. Each was to be attached to a Division, and was to form in itself an administrative unit of the French Army for the purposes of rationing, billeting, etc. A French Lieutenant was to be attached, to supervise these matters and to be responsible together with the B.R.C.S. "officer of the third grade" (known henceforth as the *Chef-adjoint* of the Section) for the efficient working of the service and the carrying out of all orders. The lieutenant was to have at his disposal a small "office-staff" of Frenchmen, consisting of a *Maréchal de Logis* and one or two others. It naturally took some little time for the convoys to learn to fit in with the French Army organisation. On the one hand, for the immediate purposes of daily routine, the Divisional authorities as represented by the *Médecin Divisionnaire* provided the channel through which orders were received by the convoy. It was the Division's *centre de ravitaillement*, also (usually at the nearest rail-head), which supplied the convoy with rations.[1] On the other hand, the branch of the Service to which the convoys officially belonged was the 20e Escadron du Train, which is the "regiment" of the ordinary French military ambulance-driver. Thus they did not primarily belong to any army, but were disposed of by G.Q.G., being attached by them to this or that army. In each army area are one or more *Parcs Automobiles*, and on these the convoys depended for motor-stores as well as for big repairs. Through them all letters were forwarded from Paris (though these could also be sent to the Divisional *Secteur Postal*), and it was nominally through them that members of the convoys went on leave and returned, though here again in actual practice it was found easier to travel, like the ordinary French *permissionaire*, as a

[1] While at Coxyde S.S.A. 14 still depended to some extent on the F.A.U. for supplies, but after the departure from that area in October, 1916, we relied mainly on French rations, only extra rations such as jam, margarine, etc., being sent from Dunkerque: it was eventually found possible to pay for these out of the indemnity which the French authorities allowed to any unit not drawing full rations.

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member of a Division. There was a Divisional *Direction du Service Automobile* which was responsible through the regular channels to the D.S.A. at G.Q.G.: and when there was any question of leaving a Division or Army, or of joining a new Division, it was through the D.S.A. that our orders came.

Some inevitable delay occurred in the delivery of the cars which were to bring the F.A.U. convoys up to their new strength, but by the spring of 1916 both sections had their full equipment. Thanks to the Dennis Bailey Fund of the B.R.C.S. twenty new Vulcans were provided for S.S.A. 13, and as many Argylls for S.S.A. 14, together with workshop, kitchen, etc. The new scheme was not entirely without drawbacks. Hitherto the O.C. of the convoy had been directly and solely responsible to the *Médecin Principal* of the Division on the one hand, and to the B.R.C.S. or the F.A.U. on the other. But now, in addition to a further independent superior authority in the shape of the D.S.A., he had to deal with a French Lieutenant, with whom he was supposed to collaborate on a system of dual control. The division of duties between the two was not always an easy matter to regulate, and it is not surprising that the convoy officers found the new conditions somewhat galling. The B.R.C.S. convoys under Colonel Barry also felt that the new regulations were somewhat ungenerous, especially in view of the work already accomplished, without dual control, and to the complete satisfaction of the French authorities. Accordingly a protest was made to the French G.Q.G. through the Commissioner of the B.R.C.S. and through the Director-General Medical Services of the British Armies at G.H.Q. It was pointed out that these convoys were much more business-like formations than those ordinarily associated with voluntary enterprise; also that, authorised by the Quartermaster-General and their personnel sanctioned by the Adjutant-General, they

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were working under the regulations of the British Army, and definitely formed part of the B.E.F. Ultimately, in view of the past experience, efficiency and official status of the B.R.C.S. and F.A.U. convoys, conditions were modified as far as these were concerned in a "protocol" to the original arrangement. Further, to facilitate matters on the question of control, honorary commissions in the British Army were given to the *Chefs de Sections* of the B.R.C.S. convoys; this, however, was decided to be undesirable in the case of the F.A.U. convoys, though the question was considered more than once.

As a result of these modifications, it came to be recognised that the B.R.C.S. or F.A.U. officer was responsible for the personnel of the convoy and its discipline, as well as for the transmission and execution of all orders; for the general working of the convoy, and for the cars and material belonging to the B.R.C.S. or F.A.U. The French lieutenant was primarily a liaison officer: as such, his duty was to conduct all official business with the French military authorities; to keep accounts of all expenditure of French Government moneys, together with such records as were required by the French regulations; and to supervise and control the use of French stores and material.

On December 7th S.S.A. 14 was re-formed under the new scheme. There is no doubt that, in spite of the drawbacks already indicated, the arrangement greatly enhanced the value of the convoys to the French Army, as they were now interchangeable with the ordinary French *Sections Sanitaires*, and could be sent instantly to any part of the line where they were needed without any trouble or special formalities. It also gave them a definite standing with the French Army, and ensured far greater opportunities of doing useful work.

From this time onwards, in spite of a number of minor changes, no big new departures were made in the

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Malo-les-Bains, March 1916.

Vanault-le-Châtel, July 1917.

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organisation or administration of the convoy. The French staff varied from time to time in size and in composition; and if occasional friction arose with some of the Lieutenants we had, with others, as also with some of the men, the most cordial relations were maintained. An English *Sous-Chef* was added, having the rank of a B.R.C.S. officer of the fourth grade, and later a Third in Command was usually appointed. As time went on, closer relations were established with the D.S.A. at the French G.Q.G., and the latter for the first time began to grasp who and what the F.A.U. was. The O.S.S.E.[1] at Paris (or, as it was later, the O.S.A.[2]) and other branches of the *Service Automobile* became well-known to the members of the convoy, who had to report there when first "matated" onto the convoy, or when going on leave or returning. The fact that we were in the same position as the B.R.C.S. convoys brought us into constant touch with Colonel Barry and the staff who administered these sections; and thus was started a pleasant association with them, which throughout the war proved of great assistance both to the F.A.U. generally and to S.S.A. 14 in particular. A large number of sections were working with the French on the same voluntary basis: reference has already been made to the convoys of the British Ambulance Committee and of the British Committee of the Croix Rouge Française. In addition to these there was a surprisingly large number of American Ford convoys, which became part of the American Army when that country entered the war, though remaining with the French. During our wanderings up and down on various parts of the French front, we frequently came across these *Sections Etrangères*, often replacing them or being replaced by them in this sector or that: we came to know some of them quite well, and the offices in the Rue Pinel (O.S.A.)

1 Officier des Sections Sanitaires Etrangères.
2 Officier des Sections Alliées.

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in Paris became a sort of common Base Depôt for all these convoys. Indeed, at one time there was some talk of concentrating at any rate all the B.R.C.S. and F.A.U. convoys in the IVth French Army area; but this plan was never found practicable.

And now having brought these introductory remarks to an end, we will invoke the aid of the Muse of History, and launch forth upon our narrative.

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Convoy Alphabet (from Marche Toujours).

A. stands for Arch, though it seems Ardley fair
That so many others this letter must share.

B. stands for Bugs caught by One who can waffle—
Also the Butter that orderlies snaffle.

C.'s for the Cumby-Cud-Fuggy-Fritz crew
Whose motto in life is "A binge or a brew."

D. stands for Donald, who lives an existence
Apart from "the herd" with amazing persistence.

E. is for Eric, whose only Fear seems
Lest the whistle should blow and he still be in dreams.

F is the Federal where Prue has his bed
With Horace the Wangler and Swinger of Lead.

G. stands for Grousing, – a fine art with some,
Who wouldn't get half as much grub if at home!

H. stands for Horace, – though really it's slang
For Dozey, or Robin and Mortimer's gang.

I.'s for Inspection – and don't tell to-day
The same faked up yarn that you told yesterday!

J. stands for John Tip, who's moderately fat,
But then there's another John far worse than that!

K. is for Kali, whose wholesale advice
Contains as much sense as the look on his fice.

L. is for Lids, and his "Gad! Top-hole church!"
But his own "Southern transept" is built on the lurch!

M. is for Milly, the one or the other:
And if that's not right, then it must be his brother.

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Convoy Alphabet.

N. stands for Norman, who's quiet and shy,
Who never gets hungry (Ye gods, what a lie!).

O. is for Oscar, who never agrees
With any remark that is made, if you please.

P. stands for Plum, an old flame of M-J's,
Who's lately been jilted for Marie-Thérèse.

Q.'s the five Quid your account's overdrawn,
So the office informs you; and you,—well, you're torn.

R. is for Redfern, who when he's not mooning
Is writing epistles,—the next thing to...(being very affectionate).

S is "'Struth 'Enry"—a name oft-repeated
By one Jimmy Brown when he gets overheated.

T. stands for Tup—and the argument's hot
As to just what he is and what he is not.

U. is for Undershields, full of the nuts
That drop off the engines "wot ain't got no guts."

W.'s the Wee Mon, who's lately gone in
To work in the workshop—that hot-bed of sin.

X. is the large but unknown quantitee
That Archie and Charlie drink on the Q.T.

Y. is so obvious, everyone knows:
There might be two Rexes, but not two Pardoes.

Z. is the Zeal and the Zest—I don't think—
With which I've inscribed all this drivel in ink.

—G.N.H.

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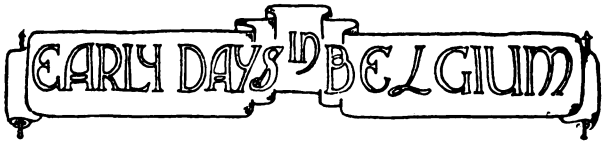
Chapter II.



It was on March 23rd, 1915, as we have already seen, that the convoy was officially formed[1]: but the section did not start work immediately, being held in reserve at Dunkerque until April 18th. On that date orders were received to join the 45th division of (French) Colonial Infantry, whch included the famous 6th Zouave regiment, as well as a regiment composed entirely of men who had been sentenced for some criminal offence, and were known as "Joyeux." The headquarters of the division were at that time at Elverdinghe. Five cars under R. M. Barrow, the O.C. of the convoy, proceeded first to Poperinghe, the H.Q. of the B.R.C.S. convoys under L. J. Cadbury's command, and thence to Elverdinghe, where they were quartered at the château which was the divisional dressing-station. Elverdinghe is (or was) a small village on the main Ypres-Furnes road, about six kilometers from the line as it then ran: the château was at the edge of the village on the Ypres road. From the 18th both the city of Ypres and the trenches in front of it

[1] The men and cars which figure in the first official list represent little more than a miscellaneous collection of names: few of them are to be found in the second list, which was compiled nine months later and which represented the real nucleus of the convoy.

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were subjected by the enemy to a bombardment of increasing severity, in which 17-inch shells were frequently used. An immediate infantry attack, however, was not expected, and the strength of the convoy at Elverdinghe remained at five cars, the rest being distributed between Dunkerque and various outstations. It was about 4 p.m. on April 22nd that the Germans released clouds of poison gas, under cover of which a heavy attack was launched. It will be remembered that this was the first occasion on which gas was used in the war: no one had either respirators or indeed any other means of protection against this form of attack: and the troops holding the line were taken completely by surprise. Large numbers were overcome by the poison: whole regiments were thrown into confusion: and by evening the position was very serious. The French Colonials, many of them of African race, were especially demoralised, and gave way completely, leaving the Canadians (who were on the right) unprotected on their left flank. Through the breach thus made the Germans advanced rapidly to within a kilometer of Elverdinghe. Meanwhile, from the moment the attack started, large numbers of wounded and gassed cases came streaming into the dressing-station in the village, completely overwhelming the cars on duty there. Most of the roads in this district consist of a strip of execrable *pavé* eight feet wide, with mud at each side: owing to the congestion of traffic at this time, progress with a car was incredibly slow. The utmost confusion reigned: no one knew exactly what had happened, or how far the Germans had advanced, and the wildest rumours were afloat. At one time, it was thought probable at Poperinghe that the men at the advanced stations had all been captured. "The ambulances worked that night," writes R.M.B., "as they had never worked before, but by the morning the château seemed as full as ever, and the lawn was still strewn with khaki-clad

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forms, some still coughing and gasping for breath, the rest either already dead, or lying inert with exhaustion from the struggle. And still they came, on hand-carts, in horse-ambulances, in motor-ambulances, anything that was on wheels and could approach the inferno of smoke and fire that was the front." Meanwhile, both British and French sent up reinforcements during the night: at "Pop." the British ordered every man who could carry a rifle to turn out and prepare to go up the line. In this way the gap in the line was closed: the advance was held up, and next morning the counter-attacks began. By this time, S.S.A. 14 was at full strength at the Elverdinghe dressing-station: other cars of the Friends' Ambulance Unit were sent from outstations in that district, including the five cars which were liberated when the Sacré Cœur Hospital at Ypres was evacuated, at 4 a.m. on the 23rd. Even so, casualties were coming in faster than they could be evacuated: forthwith all available F.A.U. cars from Dunkerque were sent up, as well as such cars and drivers from the Hon. Lionel Holland's B.R.C.S. convoy as could be spared from the Poperinghe district. All drivers whose cars were in garage were sent up to relieve the men at Elverdinghe, and in this way all the available cars were kept on the road continuously day and night until the dressing-station was clear of casualties, the numbers carried at one time being as many as 920 in a day.

From the very beginning of the battle, the Germans had subjected the lines of communication and the back areas to a severe bombardment. The villages of Elverdinghe and Vlamertynghe and the roads leading to Poperinghe came in for some heavy shelling: and it was to be expected that sooner or later someone would get hit. Just outside the village of Elverdinghe, a shell bursting a few yards in front wounded D. R. Allen, and riddled his car: C. E. Whiteley had an extraordinarily narrow escape on the same occasion. Many other cars were hit at one

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time or another: but it was thought at the time that the convoy was very fortunate to have escaped so lightly. Other accidents to the cars were very frequent, especially at night, and the break-down gang was constantly called out: it was due to H. Lithgow and to the B.R.C.S. mechanics under A. D. Walker (later of S.S.A. 19) that most of the cars were kept on the road.

At the beginning of the battle, such wounded as could not walk were brought down to the château by horse-ambulances, or hand-carts, or by stretcher-bearers on foot. After the first two days, however, this service was found to be inadequate: and as the lines had been advanced somewhat, it was found possible to send the cars forward and to establish an advanced aid post on the Boesinghe-Brielen road. As part of the road leading to this post was in view of the enemy and exposed to their rifle fire, the cars were only able to approach it under cover of darkness: even then only the smaller ambulances (such as Mors or Ford cars) were used on this run, as it was found that the heavier cars got stuck. This aid-post service was much appreciated by the divisional *Service de Santé*, as hitherto the motor ambulance convoys had only been used for evacuations backwards from the *Ambulances* or Field Hospitals, and not for the clearing of the more advanced *postes de secours*. On April 26th the château at Elverdinghe was heavily shelled: all the patients, together with the personnel and material of the hospital, were forthwith moved to some wooden sheds about three hundred yards distant. However, the sheds were also shelled, and as they offered less protection than the château, it was decided to move back again: especially as after the first bombardment the château did not seem to be receiving any more attention. It was on this day that the convoy was reinforced by a detachment of American (Ford) cars, which gave valuable help and enabled our men to get a little rest and the cars some much needed attention.

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Although the convoy was nominally stationed at Elverdinghe, the real head-quarters, for the purposes of administration, repairs and supplies, were at Poperinghe, between which town and Dunkerque a daily service of lorries was run. The evacuation hospital (C.C.S.) to which all casualties were brought from Elverdinghe was also situated at Poperinghe, down by the railway station. From here the wounded were evacuated direct to the interior by train, except the *intransportables*, which were taken to a hospital in the town known as l' hôpital de l' Union. On April 27th, however, these arrangements were rudely disturbed. Up to that date, "Pop" had been only occasionally shelled with small "whizz-bangs" which had not seriously interfered with the work: but on that afternoon, without any warning, a 13-inch shell landed in a house about thirty yards from the convoy billet. The explosion completely wrecked the building which was hit: a shower of débris fell in the yard where the cars were kept, filling the air with a dense cloud of dust. The men who were at work in the yard received a considerable shock, but luckily no one was hurt. This was the first of a series of bombardments from a 13-inch gun which made the town of Poperinghe a very unhealthy place, and resulted in its evacuation by a considerable proportion of both the civilian and military populations. The convoy moved into another billet in the Rue d' Ypres, only to evacuate it in a hurry the next night. Temporary shelter was provided at the F.A.U. hospital, the Château Elizabeth, situated outside the town on the Reninghelst road: finally the convoy settled at the Parc St. George, an inn on the same road, almost opposite the château. Here they were joined by the B.R.C.S. convoy.

At the beginning of May the fighting slackened off considerably in the Elverdinghe sector, which became fairly quiet, but continued with great fury on the British front further to the right. About this time S.S.A. 14 cars

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were often sent up to help the detachment of F.A.U. cars stationed at the St. Augustine Straat *estaminet*, just outside the city of Ypres: here a dressing-station had been set up, and a lot of running was done for the British troops in the district, as well as in connection with the evacuation of civilians from Ypres.

At length S.S.A. 14 was officially relieved on or about May 16th and all the work was taken over by a French convoy. Some of the cars went to Dunkerque, but the majority remained at Parc St. George, where a certain amount of repairing and painting was carried out, as well as a little intermittent running. On June 15th all convoy cars were recalled to Dunkerque. On the following day all the B.R.C.S. convoys which had been operating in this district under the direction of the Hon. Lionel Holland left the Dunkerque area: a number of their cars were taken over by the F.A.U., including several Argylls which, with the one 15-30 h.p. and the two 25-50 h.p. Argylls already belonging to the F.A.U., formed the nucleus of the Argyll convoy into which S.S.A. 14 eventually developed. Meanwhile the new work taken over by the convoy was very light. Four cars under the O.C. (R. M. Barrow) were stationed at Bourbourg: here the men had very little work, and enjoyed comfortable billets in a hotel. Other cars were stationed at Zuydcoote and Bergues, and the rest were left at Dunkerque, where they were employed on evacuation work at the station, a very light job at that time. On June 29th four cars were recalled from outstations, and two days later were sent under the O.C. to join the 38th division of French colonial infantry at Coxyde. This division included the 4th Zouaves and a regiment of *Tirailleurs*. Four Argylls[1] were chosen for this work, as these were the best cars in the Unit. Coxyde is a small village in Belgium, two

[1] Driven by P. E. Dyson, W. E. Greeves, L. A. Gripper and B. Jeffrey respectively. These were followed the same day by A. B. Brooks with the White camionette.

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kilometers from the coast and nine from the town of Nieuport. The convoy was quartered on the outskirts of the village, on the La Panne road: the cars were parked on the north side of the road, and a bell-tent for the men was pitched on the opposite side. At first meals were taken at an inn close by, but shortly afterwards an old bathing-hut was brought down from Coxyde Bains, to serve as a store and kitchen over which F.J.A. came to preside. There were two other convoys at Coxyde, a French Red Cross convoy (S.S.C.R. 2) and an American Red Cross section (Fords). The work was shared equally between the three, each convoy being responsible for the Nieuport Bains posts one day, Nieuport Ville the next, and evacuations and telephone calls the third. There were two groups of aid-posts in the Nieuport sector, situated at the Bains and the Ville respectively: there were also various camps and *infirmeries* from which the sick and wounded were collected and brought to Coxyde. Just at the entrance to the village was the *Poste de Triage* or sorting-station, where every car had to stop for the patients to be examined by a medical officer and assigned to their respective destinations. The *Ambulance* was quartered in some wooden *baraquements* between Coxyde and Coxyde Bains, known as the Ambulance des Dunes. The principal hospital for the sector was the Zuydcoote Sanatorium, situated on the seashore between Dunkerque and La Panne, a twenty-kilometer journey from Coxyde. All ordinary cases were brought here, *blessés* at any time of the day or night, *malades* every afternoon when the regular evacuation of the *Ambulance* took place. The isolation hospital was at Rosendael: cars sent there usually called at H.Q. (*i.e.*, at Malo-les-Bains) on the way back for mails, stores, etc. The very urgent cases were taken direct from the aid-posts to the Belgian Ambulance de l' Océan at La Panne Plage. There was also a hospital at Adinkerke to which men were taken for

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immediate evacuation into the interior by hospital-barge or train.

At the end of July the American convoy left, and S.S.A. 14 increased their strength at Coxyde to nine ambulances, which shared the work equally with S.S.C.R. 2. At this time the Nieuport sector was fairly quiet, and the casualties were few. Most of the running was for *malades*, and at different times a considerable number of men were evacuated suffering from "trench-fever." Our own men were attacked by the same disease: several members of the convoy had to be sent to the Alexandra Hospital, and everyone who went up to Coxyde that summer had a touch of it. It should be borne in mind that at this time the F.A.U. used to send any of the cars wherever they could be of use, irrespective of the convoy to which they officially belonged. There were no facilities for doing garage-work at Coxyde: thus any car which needed even the simplest repairs had to be sent down to the F.A.U. garage at Dunkerque, and on coming out would be put on to any job at H.Q. until it was in its turn sent up to Coxyde again. In this way it often happened that convoy cars were employed on station work at Dunkerque, Poperinghe and Boulogne runs from H.Q., and even Belgian civilian work (Aide Civile Belge). Conversely men and cars who had no official connection with S.S.A. 14 were frequently on duty at Coxyde[1].

The work at Coxyde, although it could not be regarded as very exacting after the hectic days of the Elverdinghe attack, was interesting and regular. The first item on the day's programme was a 4 a.m. run, one car being sent to the Bains and one to the Ville. Hardly a shot was ever fired at that time of day: the broken woods round Nieuport and the ruined town itself seemed more like the

[1] In this way the following members of the F.A.U. (amongst others) served with S.S.A. 14 at Coxyde: A. B. Brooks, D. C. M. Brooks, H. T. Brown, H. H. Burtt, R. C. Carter, J. P. Fox, C. E. Fry, T. M. Greeves, J. H. Hall, C. E. Marshall, F. L. Parton, S. F. Peirson, S. Pim, L. Plimm, G. H. Poole, G. Quarterman, R. H. Robinson, L. A. Sokell, W. O. Stapledon, F. G. Taylor, W. S. Wigham.

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scars of some olden war than the open wounds of a country over which the conflict of battle was still raging. The Cathedral might have been in ruins for centuries. The early morning light only half revealed the signs of recent destruction: the shattered homes whose inmost secrets had but yesterday, perhaps, been rudely exposed to the world's gaze through some gaping breach in the house-side, the broken pictures still hanging on the walls, the wrecked bedsteads and smashed furniture supported precariously by a few beams, the wall-paper torn and hanging in strips—all these were unseen, or but dimly descried as the car passed by. These early morning runs were usually fruitless, and by 6-30 a.m. both cars had probably returned to Coxyde. The morning was spent at work on the cars, cleaning, repairing tyres, filling up with petrol and oil, etc. At 11 a.m. a short inspection was held: at 11-15 a car went up again to Nieuport Bains—a rather more exciting run, this, as the hours between 9 a.m. and 12 a.m. were an "open season" when promiscuous shooting was a recognised sport. Nieuport Bains was before the war a typical French seaside health resort: it boasts a long promenade by the sea, innumerable villas, sand in large quantities, and a cheerful, sunny aspect which made it impossible to be really miserable. The soldiers were very happy there: the late inhabitants had left behind strong cellars, excellent stoves, and furniture of a bright modern style which gave even to cellars a comparatively cheerful appearance. There is nothing old in Nieuport Bains; and there was a saucy air even about the ruins which alienated any tendency towards regret for what had been. The 11-15 run was always a busy one, and several patients would be brought back. After lunch came the orders for the evacuation work: five or six cars were sometimes required for this. At 4 p.m. there was always a run to Nieuport Ville: this was usually a time of considerable activity, for to the Germans as to the

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French tea-time is unknown. For some unknown reason, the Boche kept a 380 mm. howitzer opposite Nieuport until August, although apparently no big attack was meditated: three or four afternoons a week this monster used to devote its attention to Nieuport Ville, where it was deservedly very unpopular. Supper at 7 p.m. did not close the day's work, for at about 9 p.m. two cars went up once more to the Bains and two to the Ville. As a rule this was a quiet run unless the evening "hate" was unduly prolonged: for both sides it was the *ravitaillement* hour—the time when the ration-carts came up—and by tacit agreement the roads were generally left unmolested. On this run the casualties resulting from the afternoon's shelling were collected: and this was the end of the day's work, unless there was trouble in the trenches at night-time, when there was always the chance of a *coup de téléphone*. Such was life at Coxyde in July and August, 1915.

It was in August that, owing to the increased number of cars at Coxyde, the camp was considerably enlarged, until it consisted of two bell-tents for sleeping, a small marquee as mess-room, three bathing huts for stores, kitchen and office, and an old ambulance-body for the O.C.'s quarters. In September the work became more serious. The British and French attacks at Loos and in Champagne caused a good deal of reflex activity on both sides in the Nieuport sector. British monitors came up the coast and shelled the German positions with heavy guns: the Boche retaliated by bombarding Nieuport Bains and Nieuport Ville, as well as the roads leading to them. On September 25th F. G. Taylor, followed by two cars of S.S.C.R. 2, took the 11 a.m. run to Nieuport Bains: they were held up outside the town by heavy shelling on the road in front, but after a time the bombardment ceased, and Taylor, accompanied by one of the Frenchmen, went on to the aid-post. He had turned the car round and was

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helping to put a stretcher case on board, when five more shells came in, one of which burst close to the car. Taylor was killed instantly, together with the wounded man and one of the *brancardiers:* four other men were wounded. As the road was in full view of the German observation-post on the Grande Dune, and there was no other traffic at the time, it seems clear that the ambulance was the object of their deliberate fire: though whether they recognised it as such is open to doubt. The car was badly damaged and had to be removed by a break-down gang from H.Q. garage. In the death of Taylor the convoy suffered its first casualty, and it is difficult to express how much we felt his loss.

For some time the artillery activity continued on both sides: the Germans shelled Furnes, but each bombardment drew such an effective reply from the French 75's that the Germans decided to abandon this particular form of sport. In October the approach of winter had its effect on the military activities of either side. About the same time the convoy became aware that the tents were all very leaky, and that a few days' rain was sufficient to put half the site of the camp under water. It was therefore decided that some more substantial shelter was desirable for the winter: wood and *carton bitumé* were supplied by the *Génie* near by, and a hut was built by the members of the convoy to the designs of A.P. and the O.C. This erection incorporated the two bathing huts which were used for stores and kitchen, and contained eight bunks for sleeping, a mess table and forms, and a very successful fireplace. Further sleeping accommodation for four men was provided in the third hut, and the O.C. continued to use his ambulance-body, which he fitted up very comfortably. The hut proved to be a complete success in every way, and was one of the most convenient and comfortable billets the convoy ever had. The feeding arrangements at this time were also excellent, and the

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meals which F.J.A. turned out (with the assistance of S. Pim) were perhaps the best the convoy ever enjoyed, and were the envy of the rest of the F.A.U. The occasional shelling of a field about fifty yards away about this time added zest to an otherwise uninteresting month.

As winter drew on, conditions at Coxyde changed considerably. There was a fair amount of running, and a large proportion of the front work was done at night. As the nights became longer and darker the driving became more difficult, no lights being allowed within five kilometers of the front, and no horn-blowing the last two kilometers. The road to Nieuport Ville was crowded with traffic every evening at the time our cars went up: only the centre of the road could be used with safety, as on one side there was a light railway and on the other a soft track worn into bad holes by the traffic. The only bad smash was when S. F. Peirson got onto the railway track one dark night and was run into by a train: his Mors was turned over and pushed along on its side for some yards before the train could pull up. The road to Nieuport Bains was *pavé*, of fair width but exceedingly bumpy. It wound in and out among the sandhills and was very difficult to follow on a dark night. Cars often wandered right off the road on to the sand, and sometimes had to be towed or pushed back on to the road. On a dark night the greatest help was provided by the Verey lights sent up from the trenches: it was sometimes possible to do a "sprint" of several hundred yards past ammunition-limbers etc. whilst the flickering light lingered in mid-air, held up by the parachute attached to it. In windy weather, the sand would drift right across the road, covering it completely to a depth of six inches or more. This not only increased the difficulties of driving, but very seriously incommoded work on the cars at Coxyde itself. To remedy this, a long wooden shed, with corrugated iron roof, was erected by the *Génie* on the side

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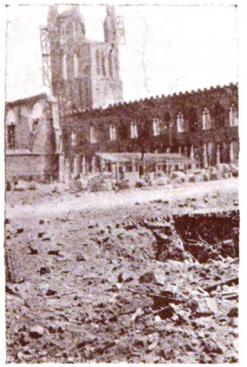
The Dunes Road, Nieuport.

Coxyde, 1916.



The Cloth Hall, Ypres, 1915.

Château Elizabeth, Poperinghe, 1915.

Ypres, 1915.

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of the road opposite to the convoy billet, and proved invaluable as a shelter for the cars.

On the morning of Novembor 28th the convoy suffered another casualty, this time from an air-raid. W. Messer had been on duty overnight at the H.O.E.[1] (Clearing Station) at Adinkerke: R.A.B. had just arrived to relieve him, and had gone round to the back of his car to light his pipe: this saved his life, for at that moment a bomb from an enemy æroplane fell and burst immediately in front of Messer's Vauxhall. Messer was killed instantly, as also was a Belgian ambulance-driver: the car was smashed beyond all possibility of repair.

About the beginning of December 1915 important changes were taking place in the organisation of the convoy. In accordance with the arrangements already outlined, the convoy, which had hitherto been largely controlled by the F.A.U. and regarded almost as one of their outstations, became a *Section Sanitaire*, a complete and self-contained unit, on the model of the French army convoys. The various F.A.U. cars were withdrawn from Coxyde, and replaced by Mors and Argyll ambulances. The strength of the convoy was brought up to fifteen ambulances and a (Benz) lorry: the touring-car was under repair, but this, with five more ambulances, workshop, kitchen and motor-cycle, was to be added as soon as possible. In accordance with the requirements of the French authorities, all cars were fitted with wooden sides and double-canvas roofs, and painted service-green. The improvement both in the appearance and comfort of the cars, was very marked. On December 7th S.S.A. 14 was officially re-formed under the new scheme: a *Maréchal de Logis* (Guibert) and two drivers (David and Bertrand) joined the section. No Lieutenant being appointed at the time, the section was temporarily formed and the administration directed by Lieutenant Pesti of S.S.C.R. 2.

[1] *Hôpital Ordinaire d' Evacuation.*

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Shortly afterwards, however, Lieutenant d' Imécourt joined the section, bringing with him a Panhard two-seater driven by Hornung, who afterwards became a leading member of the convoy's French staff.

While these changes were taking place, the daily work of the convoy went on without interruption. A new system for the aid-post service was evolved about this time, which resulted in a great improvement both in efficiency and in economy of running. Hitherto, under the system of regular runs at fixed hours, a lot of unnecessary journeys had been made, and when in a case of urgency a special car had to be sent for, serious delays were liable to occur, either in the actual transmission of the message or during the journey up from Coxyde. The medical officers were apt not to make due allowance for the difficulties of a crowded road on a dark night: with the result that our men in their anxiety to be up to time at the aid-posts, often took undue risks in driving. The new arrangement, worked out by members of the convoy and adopted (at the O.C.'s suggestion), by the *Médecin Divisionnaire*, provided that a car should always be on duty at each post, and should leave for Coxyde as soon as an urgent case, or a number of slighter cases, should be ready for evacuation. At Coxyde the *convoyeur* of the down-going car reported at the convoy base, and forthwith returned to Nieuport on the car next on duty. The improvement on the old system was from every point of view incontestable: our men were always glad to spend a day up at Nieuport, watching the artillery duels, and retiring to cellars or dug-outs when necessary. It is true that some opposition was met with on the part of the men of S.S.C.R. 2 (the reason given in one case being, that the complainant wore corsets and objected to sleeping in his clothes!): but Lieutenant Pesti insisted on the adoption of the new arrangement. The two convoys did duty on alternate days. A small detachment of the

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Hector Munro Ambulance, which had been working with a brigade of Marines in the vicinity, was also incorporated in the divisional *Service de Santé*, and was allotted the service of the Nieuport Ville posts by day only.

Another change which had gradually come about in the life of the convoy was the introduction of the practice of systematically washing the cars. During the summer it had been considered sufficient if each driver kept his engine clean, and gave the bonnet, wings and dash a rub over every day. As the winter came on and a more liberal supply of water became available, the cars were washed thoroughly after each day's running, and were inspected every day before lunch by the Chef or the Sous-Chef.[1]

Under these conditions work went on steadily but without any event of special note. Christmas came and was suitably celebrated by the convoy. Some heavy fighting one afternoon in January brought the whole convoy on to the road the following night for the evacuation of the resulting casualties from Nieuport Ville to Zuydcoote. Meanwhile, it was becoming increasingly evident that the cars were very much in need of a thorough overhaul. Lieutenant d' Imécourt was anxious for the convoy to be sent *en réparation* to the *parc* of the 36th Corps at Mardyck: but a request that we might be allowed to go to the H.Q. garage of the F.A.U. was finally acceded to by the D.S.A.,[2] and on February 19th 1916 the convoy left Coxyde for Malo-les-Bains, where the men were billeted in an empty house in a back street.

During the next month the men on the convoy and the garage staff together buckled to the work of repairing and re-painting with an energy and an enthusiasm unknown in any French (or even British) army park. The repair record-sheets of the Argyll and Mors cars testify to the amount of work done during this period.

1 The first Sous-Chef of the convoy was W. E. Greeves.
2 *Direction du Service Automobile.*

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At the same time the addition of two Mors aud three Argyll ambulances, the Austin workshop and the Vulcan soup-kitchen brought the convoy up to full strength: and the personnel was also increased. On March 17th the section was inspected by the captain of the park, who expressed himself satisfied with the work that had been done. On the 19th a more ceremonious inspection was held by Colonel Morier of the D.S.A., and two days later the convoy returned to Coxyde.

The billets at Malo had been none too comfortable, and no one was sorry to be back at Coxyde. The increased number of men made the billeting problem one of some urgency: it was solved by boarding in one bay of the Mors garage, which became that hotbed of scrapping known as the Bunk House. During April work went on much as usual: S.S.C.R. 2 went down *en réparation* and we took over the whole of the work. The convoy was divided into two shifts, which were on duty alternate days. Towards the end of the month, the 38th division was relieved by the 29th division (3rd, 141st and 165th infantry regiments) which had just come up from Verdun. The 38th in its turn was bound for Verdun, and there was a rumour that we might accompany the division: fortunately (for our light Mors cars would never have stood the strain) this rumour proved incorrect, and we remained at Coxyde till the end of the month, when we were relieved by S.S.C.R. 2. On May 1st we went down once more to Malo-les-Bains: this time we did not trespass on the hospitality of H.Q., but fended for ourselves in an empty house at the corner of the Malo Ecole square. The cars were parked in the square: while owing to lack of accommodation in the house, we had to pitch the marquee in a piece of waste ground behind the square and use it as mess-room. The soup-kitchen stoves refused to work properly: sand got into the food: there was no table accommodation in the marquee, and only precariously

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balanced stretchers to sit on. Add to this the fact that our sleeping quarters were very cramped; that we had to work in an open square surrounded by dirty and viciously inclined children; and that during one week at least Dunkerque was bombed nearly every night and several times during the day: and it will be readily understood that life throughout this month was not as comfortable as it might have been. However, the alteration of the stretcher-racks provided us with plenty of work: a certain amount of bathing was indulged in, and a game of football against the Reserves Camp resulted in one of the few victories registered against the convoy by opposing teams. A few new men joined the convoy before June 1st, when we once more relieved S.S.C.R. 2 at Coxyde.

The month of June passed pleasantly enough, the work running smoothly according to a regular routine—Reveillé 6-30 a.m., breakfast 7-0, inspection of car interiors 8-30, lunch 12-0, inspection of cars 4-0 p.m., tea 4-15, dinner 7-0 p.m. What orderly work there was to be done was shared by everyone turn and turn about. At the beginning of the month Lieutenant d' Imécourt left us, and was replaced by Lieutenant Olivry. About this time M. Stansfield replaced W. E. Greeves as Sous-Chef. An important addition to the convoy personnel was made in the shape of "Boy," a sturdy but diminutive canine who became "spare driver" to R.S.C. On June 30th, after a night of heavy strafing at Nieuport, in the course of which three cars from S.S.A. 13 came up to render assistance, we went once more *au repos* at Malo: this time we had much better quarters at Malo football ground, an enclosure on the dunes within ten minutes of the sea, where we enjoyed the opportunity of daily bathing. The month of July was one of the pleasantest, albeit one of the most strenuous, the convoy ever spent. The Mors ambulances were relegated to "the Mortuary," and replaced by one 25.50 and seven 15.30 h.p. Argylls: and it was in the

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overhauling of these that our work chiefly consisted. While H.Q. garage attended to the chassis, the ambulance bodies were brought up to the Football Ground, where the sides were half-boarded and the fixed stretcher-racks down the centre removed and replaced by folding racks—a great improvement already effected in the other Argylls. In addition to this work, there was a lot of painting to be done on the cars, both inside and out: and the more ingenious brains devised a number of "gadgets" such as extra lockers, tables, etc. Work went on from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and even matutinal or post-prandial toil was not unknown. Relaxations, however, were not wanting, the "Ocean" coming in for a good deal of patronage, particularly on July 14th, when we celebrated the French "Republic Day" with ration champagne and cigars after a table d' hôte dinner. Before leaving Malo we were inspected by Lord Donoughmore accompanied by Madame O'Gorman and a number of British and French officers.

August 1st saw us back at Coxyde once more taking up the old routine: our strength was now increased by T.B. with his Argyll camionette. The Somme battle was at this time at its height, and though the Nieuport sector was quiet enough, rumours of an Allied landing on the Belgian coast were rife, and had colour lent them by the persistent activities of the British monitors. The fire of their guns drew some heavy fire on Nieuport by way of reply. During this month two cars were sent to Adinkerke to form a permanent out-station at the H.O.E. for the purposes of evacuating to the rear. Meanwhile, it began to be rumoured that the 29th Division was to go to the Somme, and speculation was rife as to whether or not we should accompany it. Preparations were made with a view to making the convoy a more mobile unit: folding forms and tables were constructed: boxes for office equipment were made: all kits were to be reduced to such limits as in no way to interfere with the patient-carrying

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capacity of each car. The soup-kitchen was overhauled and put in order.

During our last week at Coxyde the sector became exceedingly lively: the very last night saw half the convoy lined up in the main street of Nieuport Ville, which a short time before had been subjected to a fierce bombardment. The wounded were a long time in coming in, and we filled in the time brewing cocoa in the various buses. The strafe was due to the arrival of the old 45th division to replace the 29th: and we were not surprised to learn later on that the King of the Belgians had expressed a wish to have back again the steady going 29th, with its fatherly old territorials, in the place of these hot-headed colonial troops. Indeed, if they treated the Belgian homes as they did the lockers on our cars, the houses must soon have been as bare as Mother Hubbard's proverbial cupboard.

It was with mixed feelings and with a glorious uncertainty as to the future that we pulled out of Coxyde on October 9th, and made way for a French convoy of Fiats. A difficult run over roads encumbered with all the divisional transport and artillery brought us to the delightful little walled town of Bergues, where we camped in a fine avenue of trees on the Champ de Mars. The place was an old review ground picturesquely situated on a small hill whose summit was crowned with two Gothic towers. From Bergues cars went daily into Dunkerque, where every one was able to indulge in a hot bath and to overhaul his kit, depositing all that was not absolutely necessary. Several new men were at this time "mutated" onto the section.

Meanwhile rumours changed to certainties, and on Sunday, October 15th, the convoy bade farewell to the sand-dunes and flat *pavé* roads of Belgium which in the past sixteen months we had come to know so well, and started forth on its journey down south.

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"BOY."

He joined the Section in its early days, and cost the sum of one franc. A thoroughbred, did you say? Far from it! He was too human to be a thoroughbred. No. "Boy" was a mongrel,—one might say he was a mongrel of the mongrels. His ancestors must have been mongrels for generations. He was small and woolly, a mixture of black and white,—mostly black.

He had a great personality for so small a creature. Pride and jealousy, not to mention an abnormal sense of his own importance, were strangely developed in his nature. One often felt that he was conscious of a strain of blue blood in his veins. "Boy" possessed great reserve, and an independent air, but a very loveable disposition. His devotion to his master was sometimes amazing, and exceeds all description.

His appetite was enormous, but his table manners were perfect. He never snatched and seldom stole. His chief hobby was Ratting, at which he was expert, persevering for hours in front of the least suspicion of a hole.

"Possession" to him was certainly "nine points of the law." Other dogs intruding on our billets seldom obtained a "laissez-passer" from "Boy." He was an artist at repartee, and could hold his own in any debate. Some of his opponents must have been amazed at the flow of his language. But he seldom lowered himself to fighting. His size was against him.

No member of the Section took his share of the rough and tumble of convoy life more cheerfully than "Boy." Undoubtedly he enjoyed going up to the Aid-Posts with "63." The superabundance of rats attracted him.

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"BOY."

But he had the advantage over us in many ways. The eternal question of "spare kit" never troubled him. "Second night call" presented no delicate point as to sleeping garb. The chances of porridge were for him unaffected by the untimely whistle for breakfast: he never lost his gas-mask, or wondered where his "shrap helmet" was.

Other dogs came and went — "Damnation," "Sweep," "Bimbo," and others. But "Boy" was capable of cutting any of them as he passed them in the street. His motto seemed to be

"Dogs may come, and dogs may go,
But I go on for ever."

He was faithful to the end, and was among the last to be demobilised.

"Sic transit gloria mundi."

—G.N.H.

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CHAPTER III.

Our departure from Bergues marked the beginning of a long period of continual movement, during which the very amateur cooking to which we were subjected, the extreme discomfort of such billets as we could secure (the cars were often preferred as sleeping-quarters) and the continued inclemency of the weather culminating in the intense cold and frost of January and February 1917, combined to make this first winter down south a period of very considerable hardship. The constant moving entailed through being attached to a "flying division" was a new experience, and it was some time before the men acquired the knack—afterwards reduced to a fine art by some—of making themselves comfortable even in the most impossible billets. From October 9th, 1916, until February 12th of the following year, with the one exception of Vaux, we never spent more than ten or twelve days in one place,—often less: leaving some insanitary yard to our great relief one day, only to find the next billet even worse.

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The run to Montreuil on October 15th was accomplished without mishap: we were joined outside Bergues by the other motor transport of the division, but at Mardyck the R.V.F. lorries with our workshop were left behind by the ambulances accompanied by the postal vans. A halt was made for lunch outside St. Omer: after which we pressed on at a fair speed through some hilly country to Hesdin. It was not till dark that a billet was secured in a sugar-factory just outside the town. Ten o'clock the next morning found us approaching Abbeville: from here to Poix the convoy straggled somewhat owing to plug and tyre-trouble, but by the time lunch was finished all the cars had come up, and the convoy took the steep hill out of Poix in very good style. Our instructions were to proceed to the Park of the 10th Army at Beauvoir: we reported here at 5 p.m., and were sent on to Froissy, where the staff of the 29th Division was located. Finally we were directed to go to the village of Montreuil-sur-Brêche, where we arrived about 8 p.m. Billets were obtained in the school which, in view of the large number of troops in the place, we considered ourselves lucky to procure.

The convoy spent ten days at Montreuil getting the cars into trim after the long run down. Two cars were stationed at Froissy and four at Breteuil. Great interest was taken in the new country, so different from those parts of France with which we were familiar: though only about a hundred miles inland (a fact of which we were reminded by the appearance of sea-gulls), we felt as though we were quite in the interior. At first we were delighted to be free from the sand of the Belgian coast, though later we were unable to decide whether it was not in many ways preferable to Somme mud. Our principal evacuation centre was Beauvais, and of all the French towns we visited during our wanderings, this in the memories of many of us holds the premier place. The town is beautifully situated at the junction of richly-wooded valleys: a

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fine view is obtained as you approach the town from the high land northwards, the Cathedral standing out above everything else. The town is full of interest: the narrow, old fashioned streets centre round the Place de l' Hôtel de Ville, with the old church of St. Etienne just behind. No account of the town would be complete without a reference to the *patisserie* at the corner of the square, whither S.S.A. Fourteeners always seemed to gravitate after evacuating their patients.

On November 26th we started on a two days' move to Ourcel-Maison. The first stage was only a few kilometers, to Haudivillers, a pleasant village composed chiefly of large farms and courtyards. The next day we proceeded to Ourcel-Maison, a small hamlet hidden away in a hollow. The outlying farm in which we were billeted was typical of many that we met in north-eastern France and comprised two large courtyards, the larger of which was from one to two acres in area: extensive and rambling farm-buildings enclosed the *basse-cour*, where a sea of mud surrounded the dove-cot, pond and midden in the centre. The well was a hundred and fifty yards deep, and billets were as far from it as was possible within the limits of the yard. The only redeeming feature was the fact that the bulk of the cars were on a shed-covered island in the midst of the morass: the mess-room and sleeping-quarters were in a cow-shed. Although we only spent eight days here, it seemed like as many weeks, what with the tiresome water-fatigues, and the everlasting but ever unsuccessful "attacks" and "counter-attacks" on the part of the 29th division, which was in training for the front.

On November 4th we were again on the move, and after an enjoyable run through Beauvais arrived at Rochy-Condé, where we were greeted by a number of Boche prisoners. We pitched our marquee in a leafy lane beside a murmuring stream which considerably facilitated the ablutions of those who were without buckets. The

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cars from Froissy and Breteuil rejoined the convoy here. Four days later we made a somewhat adventurous trip to Vaux, a small village some ten kilometers south of Beauvais. Here we had a deserted farm-house to ourselves: we managed to pack all the cars into the yard, and made ourselves fairly comfortable in the out-houses. For over three weeks we enjoyed to the full the luxury of a fine "joy-room" in the farm-house with a large open fire-place: plentiful fuel for the fire was provided by a fallen tree, of which no vestige remained when we left. The *repos* at Vaux was perhaps the most enjoyable period of the whole winter. Several practice-games of football were played here: long walks or route-marches were enjoyed: in the evenings impromptu sing-songs were held round the blazing wood fire. It was at this time that the S.S.A. 14 Canteen Ltd. was formed (with a capital of 150 francs in 5 franc shares) to supply the convoy with chocolate, cigarettes and tobacco, and sundries: the total turn-over of nearly 20,000 francs in just over two years provides a striking comment on the epicurean proclivities of the convoy personnel. The running during these three weeks was mostly done by two cars which were stationed with the Médecin Divisionnaire at Verneuil. Before we left, we received the first consignment of parcels (some in a rather malodorous condition) that had reached us since leaving Dunkerque. We were also visited by W. E. Greeves, from H.Q., and by a number of men from S.S.A. 13 who were then at Chaumont.

On December 4th we started on a two days' trip "up the line," spending the first night at St. André Fariviller, and reaching Mailly Raineval of evil memory about lunch time on the 5th. After spending several cold and miserable hours by the road-side waiting for billets, we eventually spent a wet night in a flooded way-side ditch: moving with difficulty next morning to the Ferme de Sevastopol.

Of Mailly Raineval the less said the better. The

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village had been fired by the Germans in 1914, and was a squalid heap of half-ruined hovels with a few miserable civilians making the best of a bad job, crowded out as they were by the military. Our cars were parked in an ocean of mud in the farm-yard: for sleeping quarters, we had the choice of our cars or a rat-infested loft. Meals were taken in the marquee. The only place where any warmth or dryness at all could be found was the farm kitchen where our office was installed: here an uncouth gathering of men in outlandish garb—trench coats, oilskins, British warms, overalls, sheepskin jackets—would assemble of an evening to try and forget their cold fingers and wet feet in a short sing-song or a chat and a smoke.

We evacuated to Moreuil, quite a nice little country town a few kilometers distant (the place is said to have subsequently suffered badly in the German drive on Amiens, in the spring of 1918). Occasionally cars were sent to Amiens, or up the line to Marcelcave: but the division was only going into the line a regiment at a time to reinforce other divisions, and no actual front work fell to our share. Before we left Mailly Raineval, the new convoy tourer, R. W. Scrimgeour's Overland, turned up to replace the Ford, which was in the final stages of disintegration.

The steady downfall of rain in which we first arrived at this place continued almost without a pause during the whole of our nine days' stay: and we were not sorry to be on the road again on November 14th. We set off along roads crowded with troops and transport, going via Breteuil to Esquennoy. Here Guibert, who had beeu with us since December 1915 as our Maréchal de Logis, left the section: he was replaced by Couturier. After considerable delay, we moved on a few kilometers just before dark to Ebeillaux, spending the night by the roadside. A few men slept in an empty house which reeked of chloride

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of lime: most preferred their cars. A timely consignment of letters and Christmas parcels helped to alleviate our discomfort. The following day we moved on, and after changing into bottom gear and standing on our brakes down a steep and winding hill, we reached Crévecœur. Here we parked the cars in the church square: sleeping billets were spacious enough, though dirty: the mess-room was comfortable but very "fuggy": it was situated over a café, and reached by a narrow and inconvenient staircase. The town itself is not uninteresting: an inn which figures in Dumas' "Les Trois Mousquetaires" and a fine old market-hall are to be seen. Evacuations were made to Beauvais, or in the case of *pied gelé* cases, to Amiens.

The day before Christmas we had to vacate these comparatively pleasant billets, and moved to Grandvilliers, a town of similar size some fifteen kilometers distant. Here billets were secured which some humourist had alleged to be "tophole": on investigation, the Place de la Cense proved to consist of an ill-smelling pond surrounded by a muddy track, with a leaky marquee pitched on a slight eminence at one side. This marquee we shared with some French *éclopés*, whose kleptomaniac propensities were only partially held in check by the car-guard whom we found it necessary to post. Our environment was not exactly conducive to Yuletide festivity, and we were certainly rather a sorry crowd: but we made the best of our so-called Christmas fare, and even attempted a few carols—only to draw upon us the ill-favour of the *Major de Cantonnement*, who objected to what he condemned as orgies of debauch! What might have been a somewhat dismal fiasco was redeemed at the eleventh hour by the kindness and hospitality of "Les Dames Anglaises" who ran the canteen for the *Depôt des Eclopés*. These ladies made us free of their recreation room: a Christmas concert, at which the Frenchmen and ourselves contributed

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alternately to the programme, was only the first of many pleasant sing-songs and tea or supper parties which we enjoyed there: and indeed it is difficult to imagine what we should have done without this hut to repair to for recreation or writing.

At the beginning of the year the 29th division returned to Belgium to replace once more the 45th division. Opinion was divided as to whether it would be preferable to return with the 29th to the old coast sector, or to risk the alleged discomforts of a French Automobile *parc* and remain down south in the hope of being attached to another (and better) division. However, the decision did not lie with us, and on January 9th we received orders to proceed to the parc at Pont St. Maxence. Before we left Grandvilliers the old Ford touring-car was at length scrapped: an addition to the convoy was made in the shape of the Federal two-ton lorry, driven down from Dunkerque by C. E. Whiteley. Ambulance No. 20, with her driver (R.A.B.) was left behind at Grandvilliers with a hole in the crank-case: both car and driver eventually went up to Dunkerque by train, arriving there at the same time as the rest of the convoy: of which more anon.

We left Grandvilliers and the 29th Division early in the morning of January 10th: the sun was just rising out of the mists on our left as we started out along the Beauvais road. We only skirted the town of Beauvais, and thence followed the Paris road through well-wooded country to the long straggling village of Mouy. Here we turned to the left, taking the lower road, and a bit later pulled up by the roadside for a lunch of *singe* or French bully-beef, just outside Liancourt. Between this place and Angicourt was some fine hilly country: the long line of Red Cross cars winding through the trees and up or down the hilly roads looked very picturesque. It was hereabouts that a lurid light was thrown on the source of the French Army meat supplies, in the shape of a dead

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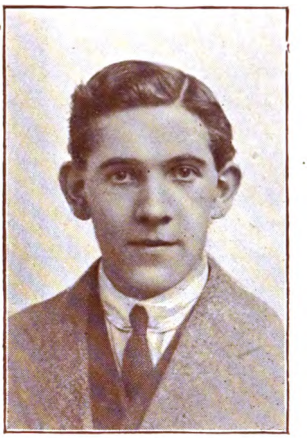
FREDERICK G. TAYLOR,
Killed at
Nieuport Bains, Sept. 25th, 1915.



WALTER MESSER,
Killed at
Adinkerke, Nov. 28th, 1915.

HUGO H. JACKSON,
Killed at
Braisne, May 27th, 1918.

NORMAN E. GRIPPER,
Killed at
Braisne, May 27th, 1918.

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horse which was in process of being dismembered and dexterously cut up by a *corvée* from a French R.V.F. section.

We arrived at the outskirts of Pont St. Maxence about 2 o'clock: as usual we had a long time to wait, during which we strolled round the place. The bridge which gives the town its name was destroyed by the retiring British army in the early days of the war: it had been replaced by a temporary wooden structure. Before moving into billets, we were visited by Captain Maxwell and L. J. Cadbury: they were, however, unable to stay long. It was dark before we at length crossed onto a small island formed by the River Oise and a canal, and took over the billets allotted to us. Supper resolved itself into a chaotic scramble round the doors of the soup-kitchen. Later in the evening, there was a fine view as the moon rose and was reflected in the water below us, while beyond loomed the dark outline of the wooded hills above the river valley. The next morning the view was even more striking: the rising sun shone on the surface of the river, which just there made a big sweep, spanned by a bridge and lock-gates. We spent the 11th getting settled in: the sleeping billet consisted of a clean, spacious attic or loft overlooking a farm yard: the mess-room was five minutes' walk up river, the cars being parked in a long line along the river bank.

Pont St. Maxence is a big *Service Automobile* centre, and everyone was looking forward somewhat gloomily to a sojourn of several weeks in the uncongenial atmosphere of a French Army park, until such time as we should be attached to a new Division. Considerable excitement, therefore, prevailed when on the morning of January 12th we received orders to move off in two hours' time to join the 120th division at the front. After two feverish hours of packing up and loading, we set off: we had a halt for lunch just outside Compiègne, and then skirting the

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town passed through Coudun to Villers-sur-Coudun. Our destination was the Château de Rimberlieu, a large house standing in well wooded grounds, belonging to the Comtesse de Béthune. The château itself was being used at that time as an hospital for *graves blessés*: we were billeted in various out-buildings—the servants' quarters, stables, etc. The billets were very much split up, and consisted mostly of small rooms: the main part of them however lay in various buildings which together formed three sides of a sort of courtyard, entered by a bridge over a moat which was connected with a piece of ornamental water in the château grounds. The rats at this place made heavy inroads on our stores: rat-hunts were organised, the procedure being to leave a couple of Argyll head-lights full on, and then to attack the animals as they ran across blinded by the glare of light.[1]

In summer, these would have been delightful billets: even as it was, though our arrival coincided with the beginning of a spell of very severe weather which was to reach its zenith during the historic journey up to Dunkerque and back, most members of the convoy will probably look back upon the Château de Rimberlieu as one of the better billets during that first winter "down south."

The work at Rimberlieu was of two kinds: there were five Aid Posts for whose service we were responsible, and there were every day two *ramassage* runs, i.e., regular rounds for the picking up of *malades*. This sector, lying as it did between Ressons-sur-Matz and the famous town of Noyon, comprised some of the hilliest country in the Oise district: the roads to the five Posts led up almost parallel to each other from the Marest-Chevincourt-Machemont road, like the fingers from the palm of the hand: many of them consisted of steep winding hills,

[1] It was on one of these occasions that P.E.D., dazzled by the light (at least, that was his explanation), walked deliberately into the moat one evening: needless to say, however, he was in no way perturbed by the accident.

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which were snow covered during a large part of the time we were there. The Poste d' Ecouvillon was in the woods beyond Elincourt, about a kilometer this side of the village of Ecouvillon: the road leading to it was very beautiful, being overarched by an avenue of trees whose every twig was overlaid with snow. The next post, two kilometers to the right, was the Poste de la Cense, reached by going up through Chevincourt and past some quarries. Still further to the right, a road led up past a battery of 155's (they were just at the corner by a somewhat battered wood) and down into a hollow where lay the little village of Montigny. The aid-post was installed in the end house of this village, which had suffered more than most of the places in this sector from shell fire. An advanced aid-post, called the Post de la Carmoy, was practically inaccessible for motor ambulances: but several members of the convoy were taken up by a friendly Médecin-Auxiliaire past this post and so up to the front line, which thereabouts ran through the actual village of La Carmoy. Of this place nothing remained but a few bits of wall, two or three feet high: a more desolate scene could scarcely be imagined.

The remaining two posts were both reached by way of Machemont and Cambronne. The Poste d' Aubert was up in the woods the other side of Cambronne: the Poste Ribécourt lay just outside the village of that name, near the main Noyon-Compiègne *pavé* road.

During the ten days that we were at Rimberlieu the sector was particularly quiet: the cars remained down at the château, only visiting the Posts when called by telephone. There were very few calls for the front: what there were came mostly at night. Most of the wounded were evacuated to the hutment hospital at Croix-Ricard: the more serious cases were taken on to Annel, where there was a finely equipped American Red Cross hospital.

The two *ramassage* cars started out at midday, and

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called at the regimental *infirmeries* in the surrounding villages where troops of the Division were billeted. The *malades* thus collected were taken to Giraumont, where a Triage station was installed in the château at the top of the hill. From here patients were frequently taken straight on to Compiègne, ten kilometers away. The Triage at Compiègne was in the old Palace stables, and the evacuation work from this point was done by S.S.A. 13, who had been at Compiègne ever since their arrival from Dunkerque in August 1916. They were billeted out at Royallieu, near a big *caserne* (converted since the war into a hospital, as frequently happened in the towns of northern France), and most members of S.S.A. 14 managed to get over and pay them a visit at one time or another.

Compiègne is quite an interesting town, situated on the Oise near the junction of that river with the Aisne. Coming from Rimberlieu, we entered the town by the station, crossed the wooden bridge by which the old stone structure was replaced, and went straight up the main street, passing the Hotel de Ville on our left: this was a pleasing building, dating from early in the XVIth century, ornamented with an equestrian statue above the main entrance. We usually left the cars in a big square further up by the church: behind this was the well-known Palace, a fine building in the style of the Petit Trianon palace at Versailles. At the back is a terrace commanding a magnificent view out over the Forêt de Compiègne. At the time we were there, the place was occupied by the military authorities: we frequently had to take *consultants* here, for examination by a Medical Board. Before the war, the neighbouring forest was famed for its stag-hunting: the Hôtel Rond-Royal, situated on the edge of the forest in the residential quarter of the town, was the centre of the hunting festivities before the war: afterwards it was given over to M. Carrel, who treated wounded soldiers on the famous Carrel system: and the hospital, with its

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magnificent equipment and expert surgical staff, was visited by doctors from all the allied armies.

During the time we were at Rimberlieu, one car was attached to the G.B.D.[1] at Marest: and later, two more were stationed at Monchy-Humières, about four miles distant. (These two cars were helping with Corps d' Armée work, evacuating chiefly to the H.O.E. at Estrées-St.-Denis: they remained until the convoy left Ressons for Pont St. Maxence, a fortnight or more later.)

During the latter part of our stay at Rimberlieu, the weather became very severe: and it was bitterly cold on the morning of January 24th, when we left the château. The 120th was being relieved by a colonial division, and Villers-sur-Coudun and Coudun were full of newly-arrived Zouaves. Our destination for the first night was supposed to be Blincourt; but as there were no billets here, we moved on, after dark, to the little village of Chevrières. It was freezing hard when we ran the cars into the yard of a *sucrerie:* after emptying radiators and partaking of an impromptu meal, we turned in, some sleeping in outhouses, others preferring their buses. Two of our number were ill, and spent the night on stretchers in a cottage kitchen. It was here that we started the practice (afterwards frequently adopted) of getting up during the night and starting up engines, in the hope—not always realised—of preventing them from freezing. The next day, three men had to be evacuated to Estrées-St. Denis with jaundice—they were the first of a continual succession of men who were laid low by this or kindred ailments during the subsequent few weeks. The convoy returned that day to Blincourt, of accursèd memory: here a mess-room, with sleeping quarters for a few, was provided by an old cowshed: the cars were parked either in a yard or on the roadside, and of all roads that was assuredly the most execrable. In addition to

[1] *Groupement de Brancardiers Divisionnaires.*

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the frost which held all things in its iron grip, the place was swept by a bitter, piercing wind, carrying with it clouds of dust from the heavy traffic which was always passing and repassing. Very little work could be done on the cars,—the touch of metal was unbearable to the ungloved hand: there was hardly any running, and altogether we spent as miserable a three days as we well could do. We were not sorry when, on January 28th, we moved up to relieve S.S.A. 18 at Ressons-sur-Matz, a small and at one time flourishing little town about eight kilometers behind the line. Here we were a little better off for billets, though not much: the work was light, the sector being what the French soldier in his army slang used to call *un secteur pépère*, a quiet bit of line where activities on either side were few and far between. There were three Aid Posts, at the Ferme de Canny, the Croix Brisée, and the Château de Gury. The second named was the nearest to the line of all the posts we served during three and a-half years' work on various parts of the front,—being 200 yards from the French front line and 400 from the Germans. In spite of this proximity, the roads up to the post were excellent. A few days before our arrival, a German raiding party had penetrated as far as this post: but such raids were rare, and our cars only went up to the posts when called for by telephone. As in the last sector, there were two *ramassage* runs daily, evacuations being made to Ressons, Estrées-St.-Denis, Compiègne, and also to a château near Cuvilly. Two cars were stationed at Divisional H.Q.

Meanwhile conflicting rumours were afloat as to our future movements. The cars were due to be replaced by new ambulances which had been promised by the B.R.C.S., and there was much speculation as to whether we should have to go and fetch them, or whether they would be sent down to us. Eventually the former course was adopted, and on February 2nd the convoy, already

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somewhat depleted, left the 120th Division, and set off for the memorable trip northwards, which none who took part in it are likely ever to forget.

The first stage of the journey took us to Pont St. Maxence, where we unloaded all surplus kit and stores, and installed the Vulcan soup-kitchen, Austin workshop, the Federal lorry, and Birkett's Argyll, with half a dozen men under T.B.'s charge, in very comfortable billets, here to await our return. No. 12 ambulance was already at Pont, with a broken back axle. Indeed, the back axles had latterly been giving the mechanics a lot of trouble, and the replacement of the cars was effected none too soon. When these arrangements had been completed, we ran out to Fleurines, a delightful little village in the forest on the Senlis road: here we fed as best we could, and retired to sleep in our buses, while the silent, snow covered forest lay bathed in moonlight all around.

Next morning, Saturday, February 3rd, saw us up and hard at work starting our engines, one of which eventually cracked the water-jacket and had to be towed. By 10-0 a.m. we were all en route, and made a good run to Clermont, proceeding thence to Breteuil where we halted for lunch. The end of the day found us just outside Amiens, cold and tired after about 120 kilometers on frozen roads. We parked on the broad side-walk of the Boulevard Alsace-Lorraine, and had mattresses allotted to us in a neighbouring *baraquement* used as a depôt for *permissionaires*. As to food, each fended for himself: some were lucky in their choice of a restaurant, some decidedly were not—among the latter being the O.C., who dined at the rate of a franc a mouthful. The darkness prevented anything much in the way of sight-seeing: and the prospect of having to get out "twice nightly" to start up engines predisposed most of us to an early retirement.

After a sketchy breakfast on Sunday morning, the

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15-25 h.p. Argylls left about 7-0 a.m., the more powerful cars following an hour later, the agreed rendez-vous being St. Omer. The road out of Amiens was difficult: we were not allowed to take the Doullens main road, and had to bear slightly west by Auxi-les-Chateau, thence to Hesdin, Fruges und Fauquembergues. We had a fast and successful run, in spite of the fact that the Overland (whose crank-shaft had broken the previous day) had to be towed: and if towing is bad enough at all times, being towed in such weather was a most miserable experience: the dust was horribly painful for the eyes, and the cold so intense—there being no engine heat—as to be scarcely bearable. To find ourselves once more in the British area, and to be directed again by British M.P.'s, was like a sort of home-coming. The journey from Hesdin onwards awakened pleasant memories in the minds of those who had travelled the same road under happier conditions the previous October. At St. Omer the big Argylls caught up the rest, having covered 48 kilometers in 40 minutes between Hesdin and St. Omer: after lunch, we proceeded in a more subdued frame of mind, via Watten and Bourbourg, to Mardyck Park, where certain formalities were gone through on the roadside, prior to covering the last lap on to Malo-les-Bains. Here we were accorded an enthusiastic reception, in spite of our disreputable appearance. And in very truth the convoy cut a sorry figure as far as appearances were concerned, the men unwashed, unshaven, covered with dust and grime, blear-eyed with the cold: the cars in a similar condition of shabbiness and road-weariness,—two being towed, while two others (Nos. 12 and 20) had been left behind hors de combat.

We parked the cars on the west side of the Place du Kursaal: facing the Hôtel Pyl on the other side were ranged the twenty-two new Buick ambulances, which we curiously examined whilst exchanging greetings with old

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acquaintances before sitting down to a well-earned and much appreciated tea. H.Q. gave us their Joy Room by way of billets, and here we enjoyed the rare comfort of heated sleeping quarters and revelled in the comparative luxury. All through our short stay, we were treated right royally, what time we held forth on the dangers and hardships of convoy life!

The Monday and Tuesday were spent in collecting and arranging the outfits of tools etc. for the new cars, "wangling," through a gentleman who shall be nameless, to retain our favourite jacks and pumps. Then there were hot baths to be enjoyed: and a grateful crowd followed Holdsworth to the stores, where he dispensed warm clothing, mufflers, sleeping-helmets, etc. It was at this time, too, that our future sergeant-mechanic, R.P.Y., first made the convoy's acquaintance, and rendered valuable aid in starting up the new Buicks. It appeared to us that the Garage had devoted more attention to the painting of these cars than to tuning them up mechanically: but we will say no more on this point, lest we should provoke recriminations: and the Garage has been heard to say unpleasant things anent "King Dicks" and crank-cases

. . . . . .

Dr. Nockolds did his best to keep us back for a few days' rest: but the D.S.A. was inexorable and held us to Wednesday, February 7th, for the commencement of the return journey. The evening before our departure a concert was given at H.Q. in our honour, and we did our best to render one or two of our convoy choruses in return. After a miserable night, spent in turning out every two hours to warm up our engines, we started off by the Bergues road at 7 a.m., a sadly depleted convoy: four men were left at the Queen Alexandra Hospital: the Overland was left at H.Q., with one of the Buicks whose timing-gear case was broken: then at Bergues C.J.B. had a collision

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and had to be ignominiously towed back: and R.S.C. who had devoloped a skin as yellow as a Chinaman's, was likewise put hors de combat. Buicks are none too easy to handle, until their various idiosyncrasies are known. The run to Amiens was difficult and tiring, and not rendered easier by an epidemic of tyre-trouble: but all the cars eventually drew up just outside Amiens, in time to witness a terrific anti-aircraft barrage over and around the town. After an hour's waiting, we crawled into our old billets, and then proceeded in search of food—the rations that had been served out to us were frozen hard and quite inedible. The night was disturbed by further aerial attacks: an empty shell-case came right through the billet roof, fortunately without doing any harm, and several of the cars were struck by falling pieces. On Thursday morning, with the help of some of the townsfolk who gave us hot water, we got our buses started, and all except a few who were temporarily *en panne* went to the *parc* to fill up with petrol. Of this, the main body, all but five got off before midday: the luckless five being turned down by the Lieutenant on account of irremediable tyre-trouble. They were told to wait for the O.C. and his contingent: two hours later they discovered that the O.C. had already gone and at 3 p.m. they started off, with feelings decidedly inimical to French lieutenants and O's.C., possessing one spare wheel between them! To add to their troubles, they lost their way going out of Amiens: but they arrived eventually at Pont St. Maxence, where they found one of our cars by the roadside with no less than five "dud" tyres. This cheering sight, followed by the pleasure of waking up the driver and his "spare" who were asleep inside, somewhat raised their spirits: but they were not pleased when told that they had to go on to Fleurines. Here they rejoined the convoy at about 11 p.m. to find plenty of mails, but no food. They were, however, pretty well past eating, and turned in at once after emptying radiators.

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At this time all official attempts at feeding the convoy had been abandoned: we just invaded cafés, drank gallons of black coffee, and thawed out what rations we could find on the buses. Friday the 9th was a so-called day of rest: we tried to patch up "dud" tyres, and generally to make some sort of preparation for the morrow's run. On Saturday morning we made a late start: it was a gorgeous day—like most of the days of this trip—the winter sunshine on the snow looking magnificent: but we really were in no state to appreciate the scenery. The luncheon stop was made at a café just outside Meaux: thence we passed through country we afterwards learned to know under very different conditions—La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Hondivilliers, Viels Maisons—to Montmirail.

Ask any man on the section what we did at Montmirail and he will say "Had a wash!" We parked in an open space on the main street: emptied our radiators into buckets: and in a few minutes every man was stripped to the waist and revelling in the grateful warmth of hot water, heedless of the comments or feelings of the amazed inhabitants. No meal being forthcoming, we were told, as usual, to fend for ourselves: some went to cafés, others made brews and "binged" in their buses, appreciating the large roomy bodies of the Buicks. These were double-canvassed, with electric light: the stretcher-racks and all the fittings were of the British Army type. For sleeping or feeding, and indeed for living in generally (and on a convoy the cars were frequently as much used for living purposes as any caravan) they were much superior to the old Argylls.

Before leaving Montmirail, yet another man was evacuated to hospital. We stopped for lunch at Chaintrix, and were on the outskirts of Châlons-sur-Marne, our destination, shortly after 2 p.m. About dusk we moved into the huge barrack-square of the Caserne Tirlet, the sordid oppressiveness of whose atmosphere put the finishing

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touch to our discomfiture. Forthwith some went in search of refreshment, liquid and otherwise, while others turned in straight away: though not before the heart-breaking rumour had gone round that cars were required at the H.O.E. down by the station first thing in the morning.

Needless to say, the cars were forthcoming when and where wanted: meanwhile the convoy moved into the billet on the Troyes road vacated the same day (Feb. 12th) by S.S.1. They had been there two years, during the whole of which time their rubbish and refuse seemed to have been accumulating. The billet itself might have been better: then again in view of recent billets, it might have been a great deal worse. There was a large and very draughty barn for sleeping and messing purposes, built over some huge Champagne cellars, with which the whole hill was tunnelled: outside, there was a yard perched on the edge of a steep bank, with just enough room for the reduced number of cars (a large number being at out-stations).

Corps d' Armée work started right away: four cars were kept at the Station in the morning, six throughout the afternoon till 6 p.m., and two all night. The running was chiefly to and from the various hospitals in the town, of which there were at least fourteen. Occasionally, there were journeys to be made to places outside the town; to the Ferme de la Folie, where there was a big grenade-school: to Auve or Gizaucourt: to St. Hilaire-au-Temple, Marson, Sommesous. Two days out of three, there were trains to be evacuated or filled up, which entailed a lot of work. Corps d' Armée work was rarely interesting: but it involved a lot of running. Furthermore, as has been stated, the number of cars available was reduced owing to the outstation work. Apart from the cars sent up to Laval to help temporarily with the evacuation work consequent upon the big French attack at Maisons de Champagne, there were four regular outstations. These

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were at Troyes (H.O.E. 33), where four cars were stationed: Camp de Mailly, two cars: and Arcis-sur-Aube and Brienne, one car each. All these stations were at abnormally long distances from the convoy base, Troyes being 90 kilometers from Châlons-sur-Marne. On the whole, the men at the outstations fared best at this time. The Mailly cars were attached to a Russian hospital, the camp being at that time full of Russian troops: the men were comfortably billeted, and had plenty of running, evacuating usually on Troyes. The Brienne and Arcis cars each had a round of villages from which *malades* had to be collected: they too evacuated on Troyes. The last-named is a delightful town, abounding in old and very interesting churches: there are furthermore a number of picturesque old streets and galleried courtyards dating from mediæval times, as well as some interesting "hôtels" or big residences built by the prosperous citizens of the XVIth and XVIIth centuries. The men at the Troyes outstation had comfortable billets and excellent food: in the evenings there were plenty of good cinema-shows to be visited.

Châlons-sur-Marne is not an exciting place: in peace times it is a great military centre, and it kept up its military character during the years of the war: in this respect it was very different from Troyes. This difference may be largely accounted for by its proximity to the huge manœuvre-ground known as the Camp de Châlons—a barren tract of land which we came to know very well during the course of the next few months. As a town, Châlons is not beautiful: the Gothic cathedral is somewhat spoilt by an unregenerate renaissance west façade. The church of Notre Dame is a much finer building. It was interesting to meet in Châlons members of the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee: they also had men working amongst the refugees at Troyes.

By the end of March we had had more than enough of

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Corps d' Armée work. For some days rumours had been rife that a big French attack was coming off shortly: it seemed likely that we might get a divisional job, and at length we received orders to join the 24th Division.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

The new-comer picks his way across a filthy Somme farm-yard, ankle-deep in liquid ooze, and infested with huge rats. His feet are wet and cold, and he is already covered with mud. It is quite dark, but under guidance he makes his way towards a gleam which issues from a dirty old marquee. His companion threads his way amongst innumerable ambulance cars, which seem to fill the yard, and past a big well, and so up to the tent. Here, in the light of an acetylene lamp, is gathered a motley crowd of some thirty men, arrayed in every conceivable variety of outfit, all talking and laughing—though what there is to laugh at in this foul place, heaven only knows. Only one thing they have in common,—they are all very dirty, and mostly unshaven. The chief feature about the uniforms is their delightful lack of uniformity. There's a lad over there with a canary-coloured oilskin and Sou'-wester hat—that's young Ardley. That disreputable old British warm once belonged—but we will not say whose it was, for the present owner might be annoyed. Contrast it with the immaculate one in the far corner—this and the very "swish" pair of brown boots worn by the same man are almost the only respectable things in the tent,—and they belong to the Sous-chef. Many men are wearing trench-coats, in various degrees of oiliness: some are still arrayed in greasy overalls, or leather waist-coats, or sheep-skin jackets. Some sport woollen sleeping-helmets: mufflers of all sorts, as well as a variety of sweaters, help to add to the grotesque appearance of their wearers. Rubber gum-boots are the favourite form of foot-wear,—they take a lot of beating when you

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are billeted in a morass. Some men prefer "Birkett" top-boots—they're jolly good, too, when well greased. Ordinary boots (as the new man soon finds out to his cost) are useless for this life. And now take a look at some of the men themselves. That chap with a moustache like "old Bill's"? Oh yes, that's Lids. The long streak of misery under the lamp is Charles—he's just turned up from Boulogne on his Sunbeam motor-bike, and is not in a very good temper. Next to him is the Wee Mon: yes, he's very minute, but I shouldn't advise you to start scrapping with him, all the same. In another corner are the mechanical crowd—you may bet your bottom dollar Newbery is talking about locomotives, and Grips about power-stations! Did you notice a chap with a funny face and spectacles, and a very charming smile, chucking bread about just now? That was Bol. Oh, he always does that, he can't help it. That chap V.A.D.-ing (oh, you don't know what that means? We call our voluntary mess-orderlies V.A.D.'s)—as I was saying, that chap is Birkett—absolutely top-hole man. You'll notice a couple of Frenchmen, too,—Hornung and David: the hefty man wearing a blue tin-hat is Hornung.

Well, come on—there's nothing doing in seconds. (That chap still eating very deliberately at the far end is Pa,—he's a Yorkshireman and likes to take his time. Incidentally, he's a jolly good mechanic.) There's only this bowlful of luke-warm water to wash your plate and mug in—but you'll get used to that! Those are the orderlies, just going to feed now. Do you see that little fellow, with a dishful of fried bread, wearing a black

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oilskin far too long for him? That's young Clark: with him is "Blighty" Jameson,—he seems to be fed up about something. The other orderly is Cumby—that tall, dark man with an evil smile: he's a bit of a dark character all round. Would you like to have a look at the soup-kitchen? Well, I'm bothered! Here's old Emp fast asleep amongst the dixies! Great chap, Emp. he's cooking at present, and is perpetually dirty. You might not think it to look at him, but in point of fact he's a great linguist!

So this is S.S.A. 14. H'm, fancy living with that crowd for the duration! Some life! And the newcomer lays him down to sleep on a stretcher, on the top rack of an ambulance-car. Being a novice at the job, he has no idea how to arrange his blankets to the best advantage: he is very cold, and lies awake listening to the guns thundering away up by Marcelcave—finally dozing off, to dream of H.Q. Billets and the old Hôtel Pyl, and all the other delights of civilisation.

—N.M.J.

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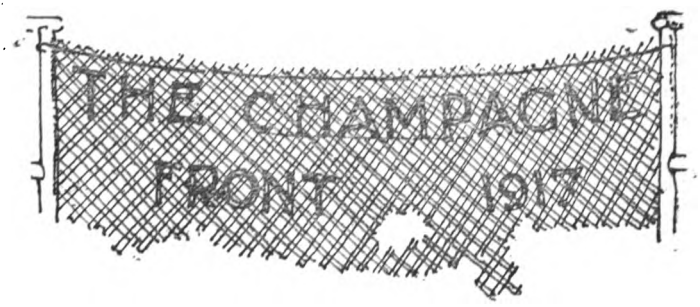
Chapter IV.



It was on April 5th, after a vigorous and by no means superfluous "cleaning up parade," that the Convoy moved out of Châlons-sur-Marne, leaving the town by the main Suippes road. It was a fine sunny day, and everyone felt exhilarated at the prospect of a change of scenery, and, above all, of work with a Division in the line. The work at Châlons had been very tedious: the weather far from kind: the billets incredibly draughty. The convoy, too, had been for most of the time very much split up. Now we were to be all together again: there seemed a reasonable chance of improvement in the weather: and as for billets, we could at least dally with and pass on the various rumours on the subject that always go round on these occasions. An ambulance convoy always leads a nomad sort of existence: and during that first winter down south, when to stay more than a fortnight in one place was regarded as exceptional, a very considerable amount of interest and pleasure was derived from speculations as to when we should move next, where we should go, and what sort of billets we should get.

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Suippes is (or was before the war) a small town of 2000 to 3000 inhabitants, distant about 25 kilometers from Châlons-sur Marne. Being only six or seven miles from the front, it naturally came in for its fair share of artillery and aerial bombardment: and by April 1917 the civilian population had evacuated the town save one or two old peasant-folk. Though by no means entirely destroyed, there were very few houses but had been hit: and the scene in the main square, for example, was desolate enough. The church had sustained several "direct hits," and the big bells from the belfry lay scattered about the nave and aisles, amongst the débris which they had brought with them in their fall. There were one or two factories in the town,—all destroyed by the Germans before their retirement in 1914. The town was fairly full of troops at the time of our arrival: there was a "*Foyer du Soldat*" in the square,—a hut where the *poilus* could repair in the evenings for reading and writing and games, as well as for the purchase of such commodities as post-cards, etc. These institutions were the nearest approach in the French Army to our Y.M.C.A. huts: indeed, the two organisations were ultimately amalgamated, and the *Foyers* were latterly largely financed by the American Y.M.C.A. We took over billets from the French section which we were replacing, and for the first time since Coxyde enjoyed the luxury of a covered garage for all the cars. This garage consisted of a big hangar or warehouse belonging to a wool-factory: one corner of it had a raised tiled floor, and was surrounded with wooden racks up to the ceiling. This corner, partitioned off as it was, formed our mess-room: the sleeping billets were somewhat scattered, and consisted of various rooms in the abandoned houses next door or across the road. The latter house we shared with several members of S.S.A. 20, three of whose cars were stationed at Suippes for front work in the Souain sector, on our right. This convoy worked under

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the auspices of the Scottish branch of the Comité de Londres of the Croix Rouge Française: and for a year we were destined to be continually working with this section as our neighbour.

The work at Suippes was chiefly front work. There was an outstation at Cuperly, where were the two *Ambulances* or Field Hospitals of the 24th Division (Amb. 10/1 and Amb. 5/60). Here two cars and their drivers were posted: they had a billet to themselves, but were *en subsistance* with the French, i.e., they drew their rations ready-cooked from the hospital kitchens. They were responsible for the evacuation of patients back to Châlons. There were also three or four cars on duty daily at the G.B.D., which was in a hutment camp known as Camp Ouest, on the St. Hilaire road just outside Suippes.

The rest of the work consisted in the service of two Aid-Posts. The sector then occupied by the 24th Division (whose acquaintance some of our men had already made at Laval, during the attack at Maisons de Champagne) stretched from just opposite Auberive on the left to a point in front of the Ferme de Wacques (just west of Souain) on the right: and for the purposes of the Service de Santé was divided into two parts, with a central Divisional Aid-Post for each. These posts were at St. Hilaire-le-Grand and at the Ferme de Wacques. From Suippes, the St. Hilaire post was reached by following the Suippes-Reims main road: a short distance up this road was a heavily-camouflaged road-junction, and behind this camouflage there were at this time four gigantic "heavies" (320 mm.) mounted on a *train blindé* or armoured train,—two on either side of the road. These guns had an unpleasant habit of firing just as we were passing: the noise and the concussion were terrific. The first village on this road is the ruined village of Jonchery: here was a post of the Etat Civil,—the branch of the medical service which is concerned with the burial of the dead and the forwarding

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of their personal effects to their relatives. Jonchery was fairly frequently bombarded: but if this village was a heap of ruins, St. Hilaire, a kilometer or so further up, was infinitely worse. Here hardly a house remained that had not lost at least one of its sides: and for the most part, all that was left was a number of dilapidated walls, heaps of débris overgrown with grass and weeds of all sorts, and here and there a bit of roof, with broken tiles and exposed laths, precariously overhanging some half-smashed dwelling. The church had been badly knocked about: the clock in the tower was leaning forward at an extraordinary angle, as though it must fall the next minute.

The Poste de Secours was in a dug-out opening out of a well-built trench which debouched on the road opposite the last house in the village: the car on duty being drawn up in the shelter of the wall of this house, so as to be hidden from enemy observation. On the same trench several dug-outs opened,—the kitchen, bunk-house, "mess-room" and mortuary. The driver and convoyeur on duty at the post took up their rations with them: these they gave to the cook, and then messed with the French *brancardiers*. The wounded were brought down by hand, either along the *boyaux*[1] or (when all was calm) down the road from Pont de Suippe a kilometer further up, the stretchers being slung on wheeled *brouettes*. Our cars loaded up at St. Hilaire and evacuated to Amb. 10/1 at Cuperly, a distance of about 16 kilometers by road. Before the attack of April 17th the front was fairly quiet: from St. Hilaire we used to watch the French guns firing on the German lines: there were several batteries in the village just behind us, including a battery of 220's about 150 yards behind our dug-out. Mont Téton, on the left, and still further to the left, Mont Cornillet, used to come in for a fair share of attention, and often the whole Moronvilliers ridge was concealed in a cloud of smoke.

[1] Communication-trenches.

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The other post was in a dug-out amongst the ruins of the once prosperous Ferme de Wacques, a mile or two from the village of Souain. This place was the scene of particularly fierce and bloody fighting in September 1915, when the French advanced slightly on this front. Little now remains of the farm but a few fragments of walls, pierced with shell-holes: but the ruins of various out-houses,—cement-built dog-kennels, a wrecked dynamo plant, and the fallen water wheel which had been for so long a landmark to the troops in the vicinity—bore witness to the former prosperity of the place. We were told that it belonged to a well-known Parisian banker: and that when wrested from the Germans, the place was found to be full of cattle, and the cellars well-stocked with wine. Behind the farm was a small reedy lake, where the poilus used to take pot-shots at any wild-fowl that made an appearance: down the road were the remains of a water mill, the machinery all smashed up and twisted into weird shapes.

For some days everyone had been talking of the approaching attack. The French artillery bombardment had gradually been growing in intensity, and on the night of April 16th reached its climax. The St. Hilaire road that night was the scene of extraordinary activity. It was a pitch dark night, with a high wind and driving, sleety rain: the road was crammed with a continuous stream of traffic both up and down-going—an uninterrupted succession of lorries, ammunition-limbers, *fourgons de ravitaillement* or ration carts, and waggons of all sorts, going up to unload or coming down again empty. Right ahead the guns were going "all out," and against the flashes from the batteries and the pale flickering light of the star-shells the long, straight avenue of trees would stand out momentarily in sharp silhouette, and as quickly be swallowed up again in the darkness.

During the attack, which began at dawn on the

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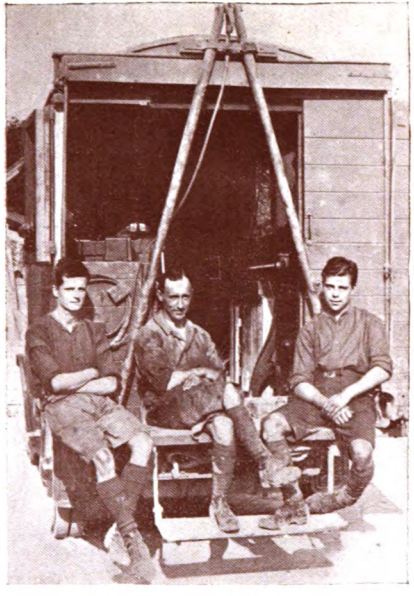

"The Black Squad"
Workshop Staff, August 1917

Aid Post, Ferme de Wacques, April 1917.

Presentation of Croix de Guerre by
General Mordacq, June 1917.

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morning of the 17th, the cars were posted as follows: a Relay Post was set up at Camp Ouest, Suippes; three cars were stationed at Jonchery, where H.E.M. was in charge, one at St. Hilaire, one at the Ferme de Wacques, and one at Pont de Suippe, up the road from St. Hilaire. To all intents and purposes, the Wacques post was unaffected by the attack: all the running being from Pont de Suippe and St. Hilaire (chiefly the former, only a few walking-cases being taken on at St. Hilaire). As soon as the Pont de Suippe car came down with a load, the St. Hilaire car moved up and was in its turn replaced from Jonchery, and so on all the way up. The down-going car called first at Jonchery, where the wounded were examined, and then evacuated to the Ambulance 10/1, which moved up during the attack to Suippes. Here the surgeons were working continuously day and night: while the Scotch convoy, aided by two of our cars, was busy evacuating from Suippes to the H.O.E. de Montfrenet or to Châlons-sur-Marne.

For two or three days no one got any sleep, except what he could snatch, a few minutes at a time, at Suippes, or at the Relay Post, or at Jonchery, while waiting to be called out again. At the Relay Post, drivers and convoyeurs lay packed like sardines on the floor of the little shed allotted to us in the Camp Ouest. In a ground-floor room at Jonchery, we kept a good fire going, and could generally reckon on something to eat—a slice of bread and jam, perhaps,—and with luck a stretcher on which to lie and doze. Jonchery came in for a good deal of shelling, particularly at night time: and the journey from this place to St. Hilaire frequently proved more exciting than pleasant, as the road was subjected to bombardments both of H.E. and gas-shells, "*lacrymogène*" gas being used a good deal. The batteries by the road-side between St. Hilaire and Pont de Suippe also attracted some attention: and at Pont de Suippe our cars had to

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turn round in full view of an enemy "sausage." The Boche continually "shrapped" this corner, and there seems little doubt that, in some cases at least, they deliberately shelled our ambulances.

The heaviest work entailed was undoubtedly during the first day, when our cars carried 667 wounded, including a number of the enemy. No further attack developed: the French had advanced a kilometer or so (reports varied as to the exact distance) and had taken Auberive, capturing a number of prisoners. Groups of these continually passed down: they were examined and deprived of all such articles as knives, etc., up at Pont de Suippe, and were then herded into a ruined barn, surrounded with barbed wire, at Jonchery, prior to being sent down the line. We were struck by the poor physique and the extreme youth of a very large proportion of these men.

After the 18th work became a good deal slacker; though we continued to work the posts on the same system till we left the sector ten days later. The number of cars at Jonchery was however reduced to two. The man in charge here was put *en subsistance* with Corporal Vire and his *brancardiers*, and fed with them in the little back-room where the swallows had built their nest.

Before we left Suippes, Lieutenant Olivry, who had been with the section since June 1916, was transferred to a section of R.V.F. lorries in the neighbourhood, his place being taken by Lieutenant Neël. Almost immediately afterwards, the convoy lost M. Stansfield, who left us to take a commission in the R.N.A.S. He had been second in command since May 1916, and everyone felt that his going was a tremendous loss to the convoy. His place was taken by A. Pearson, who had been out with S.S.A. 14 in 1915-16, and now returned as Sous-Chef.

For some days we had been watching the division going down company by company after the attack: on

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April 27th our cars at Jonchery were relieved by the S.S. of the new division: and on the 28th the convoy moved to Somme-Suippe. This is a small village about four kilometers from Suippes, in the next sector but one to the right, which was a "secteur de repos"; here the division was sent to recover from the strain of the attack under more normal conditions before actually leaving the front for full *repos*. The sector stretched from a point on the right of Souain to Tahure: the country was for the most part open pasture-land, desolate-looking and barren. It would appear that this land was never of much agricultural value, being largely used before the war for horse-breeding. Indeed, this applies to the whole of the tract of land lying just east of the Camp de Châlons: round Suippes and St. Hilaire, for example, there were several of these big "Fermes Hippiques."

In this sector there were two Aid-Posts: from each of these our cars went up at nightfall to a more advanced post, so that there were actually four Postes de Secours served by our cars. Of these, the most westerly one, known as the Poste Boudet, was reached by following a road that led up from Somme-Suippe, across the Suippes-Perthes road, to the Maison Forestière. This was a wooden shack lying in a hollow amongst pine-covered slopes, and was the scene of fierce fighting in 1915. Beyond the Maison Forestière, the road wound up another hill, through woods decimated and ploughed up by shell-fire, and then across what had been No Man's Land before the 1915 advance. Here every tree had been shot off within a foot or two of the ground. Further on to the right, was an old German encampment, still known as the Camp Elberfeld. A little beyond this, the road was blocked with barbed-wire barricades. The Poste Boudet consisted of a couple of dug-outs 200 yards from the road, and about as many thousand yards from the front line.

The *boyaux* round here were all old Boche trenches, as

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their names bore witness,—"Boyau Blücher," "Boyau Meningen," etc. On the rising ground above the dug-outs were some look-out posts up in the pine trees: from here a good view could be obtained over the lines from the Moronvilliers ridge to the left, away past Tahure to Maisons de Champagne on the right. Close by were a couple of steel-armoured observation-boxes, also fixed up in the tree-tops and very carefully camouflaged. These belonged to some 75 batteries in the neighbourhood, and the *artilleurs* used to take us up and allow us to use the powerful prismatic field glasses which they had trained on the front lines.

The day-time was spent at the Poste Boudet, where the driver and convoyeur were *en subsistance*: at nightfall, the barrier was removed from the road, and the cars went on up to the Poste Baraque, which was on the Souain-Tahure road. Here they were parked behind camouflage, about 800 yards from the front line: the corner was at times machine-gunned by the Boche. We slept in a rat-infested dug-out—the animals climbed all over the wire-netted bunks, scrambling noisily from one to another all night long: at sunrise we had to get up and go down again to the day post at Boudet.

It seems strange that a bird like the nightingale should remain at its old haunts through all the noise and upheaval of modern warfare: but in a shattered copse within half a mile of the front line near the Poste Boudet, it was no uncommon thing to hear a nightingale singing, sometimes when a bombardment was actually in progress.

Our other post in this sector was at the Bois Triangulaire, on the Suippes-Tahure road about a kilometer short of Perthes. This little pine-wood lay in a tract of waste country traversed and intersected in all directions by old disused trench-systems and wire-entanglements: between it and the front line was the ground captured by the French in 1915, including the

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village of Perthes—a place so completely rased to the ground that at dusk it was possible to pass through without knowing there had ever been a village there. Near here were some colossal *entonnoirs* or mine-craters: the ground all round was in an indescribable state of chaos, covered with shell-holes and collapsed dug-outs, and strewn with old rifles, discarded equipment and uniform, torn barbed-wire, grenades, dud shells and aerial torpedos: the dead had not been properly buried, and in many places the bodies or skeletons were half exposed.

During the day, the wounded were brought down the road from Tahure by means of *brouettes:* at nightfall, however, we went up through Perthes to the Poste de Marmara, on the right hand side of the road where it slopes up to the last rise before Tahure. Here there was a most palatial dug-out, only recently built to take the place of an old Boche one about 150 yards further back, which was used until it was found that, since the dug-out faced the wrong way, the light could be seen at night and drew the Boche fire. The new post had a wide covered entrance, from which two broad flights of cement steps led down to subterranean galleries twenty-five feet below the surface of the earth. Here bunks were ranged along each side of a cement-floored passage, below a semi-circular ceiling of corrugated sheet-iron. As at the Poste Baraque, we had to leave this post at dawn and return to the Bois Triangulaire.

It was whilst we were at Somme-Suippe that the system of working the convoy in two shifts was revived, so that each car was off the road every alternate day. Besides the Aid-Post work, there was a certain amount of running entailed in connection with Ambulance 10/1 (at Somme-Suippe) and with the H.O.E. at the railhead. Evacuations were made chiefly to Châlons-sur-Marne, *contagieux* cases being taken to Gizaucourt. One car was stationed with Ambulance 5/60 about five miles away, at St. Rémy.

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During this period (May and June) the weather became very hot. The country immediately round Somme-Suippe was not very interesting: but up at the posts, myriads of birds, butterflies and flowers were to be found. During the longer runs, to Châlons or Gizaucourt, we passed through some very jolly country,—some of the views along the Châlons—St. Menehould main-road were very fine: the writer remembers particularly the effect of the fields of saintfoin in full bloom, on the way back from Châlons one summer evening. Lépine was frequently visited, and its beautiful cathedral admired: the double spires showing over the tree-tops were visible for some distance around.

Towards the end of our stay at Somme-Suippe, in accordance with an order from General Mordacq (of the 24th Division) requiring all units in the place to build dug-outs, we set about building one at the end of the billet garden. Many hours were spent filling sand-bags at a neighbouring sand-pit, and carting sand to the billet—under a broiling sun. But it was good exercise, and really most enjoyable: and if only the foundations of the dug-out had been more adequately dug, we should have felt something of the pride that the workman should take in his handiwork.

On June 19th we finally moved away from the Somme-Suippe sector. A providential thunderstorm the night before had laid the dust, and when we started off at 7-30 a.m., conditions were perfect for a run "in convoy." We struck across to the Châlons-St. Menehould road and then on to Courtisols, a pretty, straggling little village, and across into the Marson valley. From here we climbed to the top of the hill above Vanault-le-Chatel, where we pulled up for a wayside halt,—all except the Federal, which, being devoid of brakes, pursued the even tenor of its way down the hill. The view from this point over the valleys below was magnificent. The road was lined with

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wild cherry trees, whose fruit was just ripe: and on these we levied a heavy toll. Finally we ran down into the village of Vanault-le-Châtel, where we were to spend a month *au repos*.

Most of us will always look back with delight to this month spent in mid-summer at Vanault. There was very little running: two or three cars were on duty each day, either for *ramassage* runs (the division was billeted in various outlying villages—Moivre, Coupéville, St. Jean-devant-Possesse, etc.) or to act as touring cars for the doctors. Almost all evacuations were made to Vitry-le-François,—chiefly to the H.O.E. down by the station,—though we were sometimes sent on from there to hospitals in the town.

The great charm of Vanault lay in the fact that we were right away from all things military: except the two Divisional *Ambulances* there was no one besides ourselves billeted in the village. The billet was quite jolly: most men slept in the buses or in the open: the mess-room was an old barn,[1] built of mud and plaster, which had fallen away all along the sides, leaving great gaps between the beams through which we had glimpses of wheat or hay-fields sloping down to the stream, and, beyond, a delightfully wooded hill-side:—everything bathed in sunshine, bright with flowers, and fragrant with a myriad mingled scents. In the stream we constructed quite a successful dam, thus forming a fair-sized bathing-pool. Long rambles over the hills were the order of the day: there were innumerable birds to be watched, and nests to be found: butterflies to be caught by our tame entomologist, or flowers to be identified by youthful enthusiasts of the E.S.B. type. We were within cycling distance of Sermaize, and of all that wide expanse of country round Vitry over which the devastating tide of the Marne battle

[1] A picture of the convoy messing in this barn, painted by D.W., was hung in the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1919.

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swept in the autumn of 1914. In this district the F.W.V.R.C.[1] work was largely centred, and several members of the convoy were able to renew old acquaintances with the "War Vics." At this time S.S.A. 13 were also *au repos* about 25 kilometers away: a team from S.S.A. 14 went over to Le Vieil Dampierre to play them at football, and their team visited us at Vanault a short time afterwards for the return match. This was the first time the convoys had met since January: it is satisfactory to be able to record that both matches were won by us.

A great event was the decoration of five[2] members of the convoy with the Croix de Guerre. This took place on June 22nd. The afternoon was spent in undergoing a vigorous training in drill at the hands of J.W.B. in preparation for the event. After much polishing of buttons, we were marched up to the village *place*, where we formed a square together with the *brancardiers* of the division: the five "heroes" (R.M.B. representing P.E.D. who was on leave) were lined up in front of us. Presently General Mordacq dashed up on horse-back, reining up in the middle of the square: it was a most dramatic entry. He was followed at some distance by an escort of mounted gendarmes, one of whom carried the general's flag. After an eloquent and very complimentary speech, he dismounted and pinned the medal on the breast of each in turn, shaking hands with them and offering his congratulations. Finally we "marched past" and then returned to billets. Altogether it was quite an effective scene; and the French language certainly lends itself to that kind of speechifying.

Towards the end of our *repos*, we had a great route-march to La Chaussée (on the Marne) and back,—a distance in all of about 35 kilometers. Although

1 Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee.
2 H. E. Milton, B. Jeffrey, A. E. Newbery, P. E. Dyson, L. A. Gripper.

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ambulance driving isn't conducive to the best athletic training, everyone enjoyed it,—particularly the bathing in the river and the al fresco lunch by the Marne-side. It was a very pretty spot, within a few minutes walk of the village of La Chaussée, which was much patronised by the more bibulously inclined members of the convoy.

Altogether the month spent at Vanault was most enjoyable, with all the bathing, rambling over the country-side, and "bingeing." (Vanault is famous for its honey; and as for cherries, both cultivated and wild,—only a small percentage of the convoy can claim never to have had reason to repent of over-indulgence in this respect.) We were very sorry when on July 13th half the convoy left Vanault for the Ferme de Piémont (about six kilometers from Suippes) followed the next day by the rest of the cars. The journey was uneventful, pleasant enough except for the dust, which made everyone look like a miller by the time he arrived at the journey's end. We took over billets from an American section: there was a wooden hut (one of a hutment camp) for sleeping, and a small lean-to or shanty as mess-room. It was not a particularly cheerful billet—a military camp at the best of times is depressing, and this one was very dry and dusty, being situated by the side of the Châlons-Suippes main-road, from which clouds of dust continually drifted over it.

Fortunately we were not destined to stay here: on the 19th we moved to Bussy-le-Château, where we had quite good billets at the foot of a barrow or mound on the edge of the village. A sort of hollow,—what might once have been a moat,—ran round the foot of this mound: and here the cars not on duty were parked. The workshop, motor-stores, etc., were in a neighbouring farmyard, between this and another higher hillock, on the summit of which was an old windmill with a sinister-looking black hand on it.

For working purposes, during all the time we were at

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Bussy, the cars were divided into two shifts, which went on duty alternately for a week. Of the cars on duty, seven were working the posts, with their base at the Camp Ouest, Suippes: three were stationed at the Ambulance 10/1 at Cuperly, for evacuation work. The first time we re-visited the Camp Ouest, the place presented a very striking contrast with its appearance at the time of the April attack, with which it was associated in the minds of most. What was at that time a waste of mud had been transformed by the middle of July into a riot of tall grasses and wild flowers. We were *en subsistance* with the G.B.D., and had a small room—the end of a hut half sunk in the ground—put at our disposal. The drivers went out in rotation, taking their chance of Aid-Post work or evacuation runs to Cuperly or Châlons.

The posts which we worked at this time covered a slightly wider sector of front than that which was held by the division in April,—a new post, known as *Bois Carré*, being added to those which we already knew. This post was in a small wood by the side of the road leading up to Auberive—not far from the slopes of Mont Téton, the most easterly of the three hills forming the Moronvilliers heights, and about 6 kilometers north-east of Mourmelon-le-Grand. From Bois Carré our cars occasionally had to go forward to the advanced Poste Gosset, a few hundred yards beyond the Suippes-Reims road. Our aid-post consisted of a deep sap right under the roadway: the kitchen and mess-room opened out of a trench in the wood. It was quite an interesting post: in the fields immediately behind were a number of 75 batteries, which used occasionally to lift up their voices to some effect: and in despite of the fat old *caporal*, who was imbued with a healthy respect for the Boche "sausage" which commanded a good view of the roadway, there were interesting visits to be made to the old French and German front lines just this side of Auberive. Here the souvenir

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hunter fonnd a veritable paradise: and it was with great reluctance that we had to abandon the idea of removing for the benefit of the convoy a bath and a piano which we discovered in some old Boche second-line dug-outs. The village of Auberive is practically non-existent: a few heaps of bricks and fragments of wall, by the Suippe river, are all that remains. It appears that these trenches were at one time held by the Russians, and notices in Russian were still left in the *boyaux*.

At St. Hilaire we had a car posted in the same place as in April: this car, however, went up at nightfall to an advanced post on the St. Souplet road, returning at day-break to St. Hilaire. At this time of the morning the struggling beams of sunlight would fall almost horizontally on the outlying ruins of St. Hiliare, making them appear to stand out in ghostly whiteness—a weird and striking scene.

Another car was stationed at Pont de Suippe: from here, very rarely, a car would be sent on by a very bad *piste* or field track to the Poste Rose for *blessés*. There was a pool in the Suippe river, quite near the post, which offered splendid bathing facilities to those who were aquatically inclined.

The third and most easterly post was the Ferme de Wacques: the Aid-Post itself was a good kilometer west of the farm, in a little wood by a stream-side. It was a jolly place, an oasis in the desert of bare, open country around: there was a bridge over the river which seemed to have been made for diving off: and during the quiet days, when hardly a shot was fired and there were no wounded, we divided our time pleasantly enough between bathing, reading, and consuming the excellent "*patates*" which the little *cuistot* turned out. At nightfall we went up to an advanced post known as the Poste Gouraud: we occupied a sap 300 or 400 yards from the aid-post. This dug-out when we first took it over was in a very

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dilapidated condition: it had once been a battery dug-out, but the position had been heavily shelled, and the place deserted long ago. However, by dint of some vigorous spade work the sap was made quite habitable. But it was at best a cheerless sort of place, and sleep was disturbed all night through by the rumble of the *tacot* or light railway trucks, which were passing to and fro immediately overhead, loaded with rations, material of all sorts, munitions, etc., and drawn by horses or mules. At daybreak we returned to the Ferme de Wacques post: at this time, if it were a fine morning, the whole landscape with its desolation of old trenches and disused dug-outs and shell-holes and barbed wire, was transformed by the cold clear light in which everything was bathed: while down in the valley towards Souain, the land would be covered, as though flooded, with what seemed to be a great expanse of water, a shallow mere whose surface lay white and cold and still in the early morning. The ruined walls of the farm stood out against this, in the great watery waste, like some old Druid monument. But presently this lake would appear to rise bodily from the ground, and would gradually dissolve in a ground mist, and disappear like some mirage in the desert.

These three posts were all worked from Suippes: any car coming down was immediately replaced by another: so that the sojourn of a driver at the post might be anything from a few minutes to a week, according to the frequency or otherwise of cases for evacuation.

The men stationed at Cuperly were *en subsistance* at the hospital, and had a jolly little billet to themselves. A divisional photographer who was attached to the hospital became very popular about this time, and before we left the sector, most of the drivers, with their respective buses, had posed before his camera.

The shift which was off duty down at Bussy had no running: and during this period a large number of the

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cars were painted both inside and out. Many of us will long treasure very pleasant memories of that billet at Bussy. During the fine weather the tables were put outside under the patriarchal walnut tree which filled the central space, and all meals were served outside. In the evenings, scratch games of rounders, with interludes of French cricket (on the principle that when in France you do as the French do—only they apparently don't) were followed by open air sing-songs, to the accompaniment of T.B.'s guitar and H.E.M.'s one-string violin. At sunset the scene was very beautiful: the ambulance cars, with their red crosses; the walnut-tree, overshadowing the tables and forms; and in the distance the steeple of the village church, combined to make a very charming picture, for which the varied colours of the sunset sky provided an ever-changing background.

At the beginning of September, Captain Maxwell, accompanied by L. J. Cadbury, H. Watts, and Ernest Jones, paid a visit to the convoy: their arrival coincided with a big *coup de main*, almost reaching the dimensions of an attack, which took place in our sector. On the evening of September 7th a number of us were sent up as a working-party to widen out the mouth of a communication trench (behind the Poste Gouraud) so as to enable an ambulance to back in. An hour and a half's pick and shovel work made little apparent impression on the trench, though its effect on our hands and muscles (not to speak of our tempers) was by no means so insignificant. Fortunately it was a clear night: and this, with the flickering of the star-shells, enabled us to work without much difficulty.

The attack took place the next afternoon, after a pretty intense artillery preparation. Indeed the French had been massing artillery in the sector for some time, and immediately behind the Wacques post a number of 155 batteries had been in position, and firing, for a con-

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siderable period previous to the attack. All our cars went to Suippes, going up and down from the Camp Ouest. A number of prisoners were taken, and there were a good many casualties, which kept our cars busy till fairly late in the evening.

It was while we were at Bussy that Lieutenant Neël left the convoy to take charge of an R.V.F. section. Though glad of his promotion, we were extremely sorry to lose him: one and all had always got on well with him, not only in an official capacity, but individually, and we felt that he had a very real interest in the convoy. Perhaps it was the fact that he had English blood in his veins that enabled him to understand us, and us him, so well. He was succeeded by Lieutenant Piot, who brought with him his own driver (Bruckert) and a De Dion tourer.

We finally left the Suippes sector on October 8th, going *au repos* with the division: we started off via La Cheppe and Cuperly, thence to Bouy, and so by Les Grandes Loges to the Marne-side by Vraux. Our course then lay for some miles along the riverside: we passed Condé (where we met Lieutenant Neël again) and Tours. Leaving Epernay on the left, we passed through Dizy, one of that town's suburbs: here B.J. met Lieutenant Olivry—our former lieutenants seemed to dog our steps in these parts. From Dizy we continued along the right bank of the Marne, by Damery (whence we had a good view of the Château de Boursault above the trees the other side of the river) and so up to Châtillon—the statue of Pope Urbain II., which stands out in a commanding position above Châtillon village, was a prominent land-mark up the valley for some distance ahead. From Châtillon we continued to Romigny: this place is associated in the minds of most of us with unlimited mud and rain: the billet was poor enough,—a hut in a camp said to be the highest in situation of all the camps in the Marne department—and the weather was simply execrable.

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After two blasphemous days in this place, we moved to more permanent billets at Passy-Grigny, a little village about five kilometers N. of the Marne, and eight from Dormans. The cars were parked along the road-side: the mess was a very ill-lit room, used in peace-time, apparently, as a pressing-chamber for the vintage, and the presses took up the whole of the end of the room. It opened on a small yard, where the soup-kitchen was parked: the workshop was further up the road in the village square, and still further away were the sleeping-billets,—a store-house or barn reached by climbing a somewhat precariously erected ladder. The billet was not all that might have been desired, but it wasn't bad. Furthermore, it was a billet with a history. In the early days of the war—so we were told by the *patron*,—General Nivelle slept here: he was roused from his bed one morning, to be told that a party of Uhlans had arrived at St. Gemme, two or three kilometers up the road. Later, the place was utilised by the Boche as a dressing-station during the fight for the bridge at Dormans. And not many months after we left, the village was destined once more to be the scene of bitter fighting.

The village of Passy-Grigny,—at any rate, one part of it,—was rather pretty: a narrow, steeply rising street was flanked with picturesque houses, many of them vine-covered, while here and there one had very charming glimpses into some galleried *basse-cour*. The surrounding country is very jolly, as we discovered in the course of numerous walks in the neighbourhood. We were (for the first time in our continental wanderings) in the famous vine-growing country which has made Epernay and Reims so famous for their wines. After the outbreak of war, many vineyards were perforce left untended, and the vines had run to seed: and even where they had been tended, the vintage had already been gathered in: but here and there a cluster had been overlooked—the grapes are quite

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sweet to eat, but very small. The views on all sides were greatly enhanced by the wealth of autumnal colouring, which was magnificent.

During this *repos* we had no running from Passy-Grigny itself, but there were two outstations. Four cars were stationed at Romigny, where our men were *en subsistance* with the Ambulance 10/1: we were allowed to eat our meals in the kitchen of a refugee, who also put her stove at our disposal—a great boon. These four cars had a good deal of work: patients had to be picked up from a wide area stretching as far as Lagéry, Savigny and Rosnay, and evacuated either to Bouleuse or to the H.O.E at Epernay Station, whence they were usually taken on to various hospitals in the town. A fire occurred in the camp at Romigny about this time which from a spectacular point of view was a very fine sight, a wooden hut being completely burnt out after a very few hours' blaze. The other outstation was at Verneuil, where two cars were nominally stationed for Army Corps work: the men here had very little running, but led a pleasant enough life. It was here that we made the acquaintance of three English nurses at the château hospital;—which ultimately led to a party of songsters from the convoy going down to the château one evening and giving a more or less impromptu concert to the patients,—who appeared quite appreciative whatever may have been their real feelings.

During off days at Passy-Grigny, many expeditions were made: there was Dormans to be visited, and some of the more energetic spirits even struck out into the Forêt d' Enghien beyond, in the direction of Epernay. Another pleasant walk was over the hills by Vandières to Châtillon,—a village finely situated on a hill crest, commanding a good view over the Marne valley. Right below Châtillon, just above the Port-à-Binson bridge, rose the tall spire of the Prieuré de Binson: this place was a White Friars' monastery, but was being used

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chiefly as a hospital,[1] staffed by English "F.A.N.Y.'s." We exchanged visits with the "Fannies" here,—they proved to be a very sporting lot, and we were always sure of a welcome there for tea. Some of them came over to one of our sing-songs at Passy-Grigny; and some of our own musical stars took part in a concert which was organised at the hospital for the delectation of the patients. The Prieuré de Binson soon became a favourite objective for an afternoon's outing.

On [2]November 6th a team of stalwart S.S.A. Fourteenites wended their way in the Federal to a little village called Ronchères, about ten kilometers distant, to play football against S.S.U. 65. Several of the proletariat walked over to watch the game. The Yanks played with tremendous "hustle" and a phenomenal amount of noise, but did not display a very intimate knowledge of the game or the rules thereof. After an easy victory we were provided with tea in their marquee: in the course of the meal our hosts sang to us various songs from their repertory, including "Un, Deux, Trois, Quatre,"[3] a simple yet forcefully expressed ditty which has since taken its place alonside "Roger Rum" and other old favourites as a convoy classic. We all crowded into the Federal for the return journey, together with half a dozen Frenchmen of our Division who had turned out to support us: forthwith the welkin rang with English and French songs alternately, sung with all the strength of our lungs.

The latter part of our stay at Passy-Grigny was enlivened by various conflicting rumours as to what was to happen to the Division and to ourselves. When the French attack on the Craonne plateau developed, we had heard the heavy bombardment, and expected to go up the

[1] It was here that B.I.R., and later O.B.L. and H.G.C. were in hospital for a time.

[2] This was the occasion on which T.B. tried his Argyll on cross-country tank-work with not altogether satisfactory results.

[3] The popularity of this song was fully ensured on the occasion of a return visit paid by S.S.U. 65 to the convoy a few days later.

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line: but we had stayed on at Passy. Now rumours were afloat that the Division was going to Italy: the possibility became a probability, and hopes ran high: we had visions of the convoy operating on the mountainous heights of the Italian front. But it was not to be: after doubt and uncertainty almost up to the last minute, the fates decided against us, though the Division went. A day or two before their departure, General Mordacq met two of the members of the convoy and stopped them: he shook hands and asked them to convey to the section on his behalf the gratitude and appreciation which he felt for the work they had done, and to say how sorry he was that he had been unable to arrange for them to go with the division. For our part, we were very disappointed not to go: apart from our chagrin at missing the trip to Italy, we were sorry to leave a division which in the course of six months' working together we had got to know pretty well.

We left Passy-Grigny on November 20th and moved to the H.O.E. at Bouleuse,—a big clearing-station outside the little village of St. Euphraise, just off the Reims-Ville-en-Tardenois road. A large hutment camp was built round the hospital, and one of these huts was given over to us as our billet. The cars were parked in the woods by the roadside, right at the other end of the camp, which for a time necessitated the posting of a night-guard. During the month which we spent at Bouleuse, the weather was very cold, frost or snow being almost continuous. Work was very slack: what little there was we shared with two other convoys (S.S. 1 and S.S. 9) so that our cars were only on duty one day in three. The running was mostly evacuatory work from the H.O.E. to the villages of Jonchery, Sapicourt, Savigny, Gueux, and occasionally to Epernay: sometimes patients had also to be brought in from surrounding villages to the H.O.E.

It was during our time at Bouleuse that the value of

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sabots or wooden clogs came to be generally appreciated by the convoy: and after inspection of billets in the morning, parties of twos and threes might be met clumping down the frost-bound road to the car-rank: indeed, it was impossible to keep the feet warm in ordinary boots. The slackness of work and the coldness of the weather combined to make walking a favourite occupation. Short, sharp "route-marches" immediately after breakfast became the order of the day: and during off-duty hours there were jolly walks to be taken over the surrounding country. A favourite place to visit was a small chapel on a ridge about five or six kilometers from the hospital. This place, known as the Chapelle St. Lié, is situated just above the village of Villedommange: and from it a magnificent view could be obtained over the Vesle valley, with Reims in the low-lying ground just in front. The town was only about nine kilometers distant, and every building could be distinguished, the cathedral front dominating the whole town. On a clear day the carving and sculpture on the façade were easily discernible. The outline of the Hôtel de Ville, which was burnt out in April 1917, and the west front of St. Rémi church at the southern end of the town, could also be seen. On the hill-side beyond, the two systems of trenches formed a network across the fields: behind the German lines the villages of Cernay and Nogent l' Abbesse were visible, their ruins gleaming white in the sun. Beyond the town to either side the view extended for miles: on the right was the Fort de la Pompelle, with the chalky Moronvilliers heights stretching away to "La Champagne Pouilleuse": on the left, the Fort de Brimont overlooking the big main road ("Route 44") from Reims to Laon. Often the German batteries from Witry would be shelling the town, and puffs of shrapnel could be seen drifting away over the Quartier de Laine, where are all the once prosperous wool-factories of Reims.

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As Christmas Day drew near, we heard rumours of a "sketch, or something," and nocturnal wanderers would come in of an evening with reports of weird and wonderful noises proceeding from an unoccupied hut at the other end of the camp. We celebrated Christmas on the 24th. The proceedings opened with a colossal Christmas dinner which would have delighted the heart of Scrooge after his awakening, as much as our fare the previous year would have appealed to him in his meaner days. Verily our cooks[1] surpassed themselves, and so did our appetites. We will not print the mênu,—for after all, it was war-time: and who knows but what some minion of the Food Controller may still be abroad, seeking whom he may devour?

When the heroes of this truly Homeric feast had "put off the desire of meat and drink" and were just about to adjourn from the mess-room, our O.C. rose to announce that he had just received orders for us to join the 157th Division, which was then holding the line a bit west of Reims, in two days' time. The news was hailed enthusiastically: we were all anxious to get back to a division after a month's Army Corps work. The occasion was made one of farewell to R. M. Barrow, who after three years' service with the Unit, during the greater part of which time he had been "Chef-Adjoint" of S.S.A. 14, announced that he was leaving the following day for England, with a view to training for a commission. The members of the convoy asked him to accept a small smoking-cabinet, in memory of the months he had spent in France as their O.C. He left the following day, the best wishes of the section for his future career going with him. His place was taken by A. Pearson, at that time second in command. The afternoon's programme was divided into two parts,—a concert, followed by a short sketch. Both were an unqualified success: an excellent

[1] At this time, J.L.S. and H.F.

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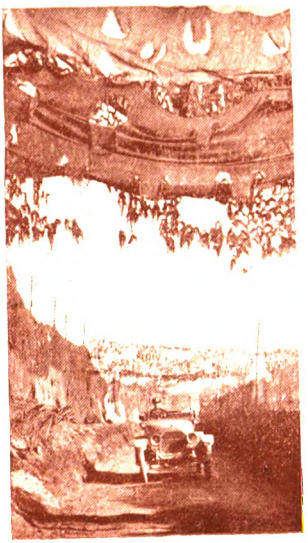
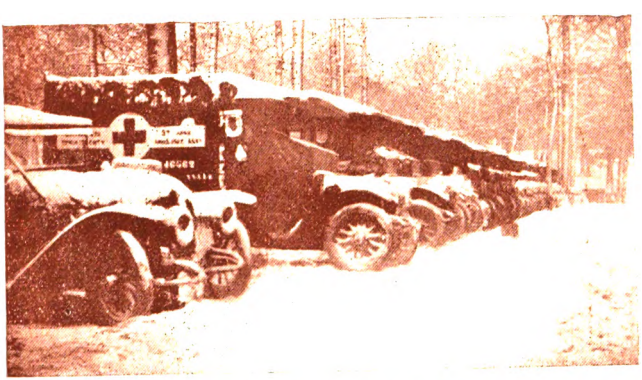
Maréchal Conturier.
"Eh, dis donc!"



"Défense de Stationner."



"The Cab-rank," Boulcuse, December 1917

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stage had been erected with electric lighting complete. The sketch[1] was entirely topical, and to an outsider would hardly have been intelligible, but the convoy showed themselves a highly appreciative and not over-critical audience, and the piece "went very well."[2]

It was lucky that we had decided to have the celebration when we did; for Christmas Day was spent packing up and preparing for the morrow's move. On the morning of Boxing Day, we started off in convoy along roads made slippery by a recent fall of snow on top of ice. The journey was not a long one, but was not uneventful, owing partly to the skidding (in which every bus indulged with somewhat elephantine playfulness) and partly to a big convoy of horse traffic with which we got entangled round about the village of Pargny. Our course was by Vrigny, Gueux and Muizon (Gare), and so across the river to Châlons-sur-Vesle. Arrived here, we found our predecessors, a French section, still in occupation: and for some hours the little triangular *place* in the middle of the village, where the cars were parked, was crowded with the ambulances of the two sections. The billets at Châlons-sur-Vesle, which was to be our home for five months, were somewhat scattered: sleeping-billets were in various houses or out-houses around the *place*, the mess-room a sort of shanty or lean-to, with the kitchen partitioned off at one end. On the whole, we were fairly comfortable: and indeed, during the whole of the winter of 1917-1918, the convoy fared far better than the previous winter.

[1] Written and stage-managed by S.H.H.

[2] No account of Boulcuse would be complete without some reference to "Sweep." The name alone will be enough to recall fragrant memories to the minds of all who knew him. . . . He died, suddenly, on January 3rd. 1918.

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Frenchmen We have Known.

He was an unwashen, unshaven old fellow, "grand-père Ch-ti-mi," and he lived in a little *abri* as insanitary as himself, up the St. Souplet road. He had no teeth worthy of the name: but a few discoloured fragments served to grip a foul old pipe, stuffed full of that malodorous mixture known as *scaferlatti pour les troupes*. He was a great lad for spinning the yarn:—"en dix-neuf cent quatorze, quand j' étais dans les fantassins . ." he would start: and then his imagination would get to work. He came from the Pas de Calais, and all the other *brancardiers* used to laugh at his accent: he had no education whatever, but that did not trouble him in the least. On the contrary, he regarded himself as distinctly a *bon garçon*, and rather prided himself on his talent for after-dinner small-talk. After disposing noisily of *la soupe*, and swilling down a litre of *pinard*, he would fill up his tin *quart* with *du jus avec de la gniole*, and then he would hold forth. He always got hold of the wrong end of the stick in any discussion that arose, and always stuck manfully to his guns, quite impervious to the claims of truth or of reason. Officially he was a *brancardier divisionnaire:* but he was never known to lift a stretcher. "C' 't un numéro, c'ui-là" was the verdict of *les copains:* and when that has been said, there's not much else to be added.

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Frenchmen We have Known.

THE *brancardiers* at Villers-Franqueux used to wink and nod their heads, and say that he was a bit "toc-toc." He was a fat, somewhat oily sergeant, with a ridiculous apology for a beard under the lower lip: he wore glasses: his eyes were big,—"saucer-like" the modern novelist would probably call them. He spoke slowly and deliberately, in a high-pitched, almost squeaking voice. His form of greeting to new arrivals was unvarying. As soon as we had switched off the engine, he would come up. "Bonsoir, monsieur." "Bonsoir." "Qu' est-ce que vous faites en civil, monsieur?" And forthwith he would give his opinion on whatever line of life had been mentioned. His was distinctly a utilitarian outlook on life, and to one who had the temerity to admit that he had been a student of Latin and Greek, he descanted in a fatherly kind of way upon the futility of such studies—"ça ne gagne pas d' argent." He had been engaged before the war in more than one business enterprise: he was quite smart with his fingers, and was even something of a connoisseur in art. He used to show us sketches, which he had done of various parts of the front. He was quite interesting to chat with,—for a time: but, as with all good things, one could have too much of him.

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Frenchmen We have Known.

WHO does not remember le caporal Vire,—the squint-eyed corporal at Jonchery? He was a cheery little man from the Midi, with a nasal accent and a priceless physiognomy, Like most Frenchmen, he usually had several days' growth of black hair on his face and chin. But his chief feature was his squint: his eyes looked in every direction, outwards and inwards, and backwards and forwards, all at the same time. He was one of those disconcerting persons, of whom you can never be certain whether they are addressing themselves to you or to someone else in another part of the room. He had a lively disposition, and he needed it: for his job was somewhat lugubrious. He was in the Etat Civil, and had to look after the effects of the men killed in battle, as well as to make arrangements for their burial in the little cemetery down the road. He always had a small stock of *briquets*, with which he used to supply all his *copains*. Most of his men, like himself, came from the south: and at meal-times the conversation was bristling with oaths of Provence,—"Boun couquin de Diou" and similar expressions, full of the heat and passion of the sunny south. Abundance of *pinard* always moved the caporal to song: he had in fact some voice, which he did not hesitate to use to its full power: and he frightened the swallows from their nest on the rafter overhead by the stentorian tones in which he rendered some of the operatic masterpieces. He was a simple soul withal, and thoroughly good-hearted. And he was exceedingly hospitable, always ready to share his *camembert* cheese or his *bidon* full of *pinard* with anyone who came along.—Au revoir, caporal, et bonne chance, hein!

—N.M.J.

* * * * *

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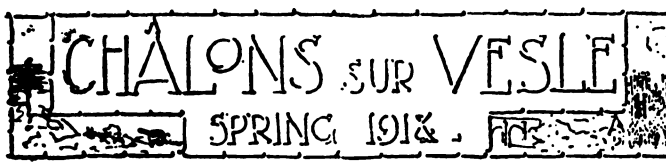
Chapter V.



The 157th Division (comprising the 214th, 252nd and 333rd infantry regiments) to which we were now attached, was holding the line from Courcy, along under the Fort de Brimont, to Loivre. The sector, if not a particularly lively one, was always interesting. Our two aid-posts were in the villages of Villers-Franqueux and St. Thierry respectively: both these places are on the crest of the high ground overlooking the Reims valley and Route 44. At St. Thierry, the car was stationed by the entrance of a château which in olden days had belonged to the Archbishop of Reims. A terrace in the grounds of this château commanded a view straight over that city, two or three miles away. But the best view was obtained from an artillery observation post in the attic of a house known as the *Maison Blindée*. This place, which was strongly reinforced with concrete by the Russians during their occupation of the sector in April 1917, commanded a splendid outlook. Through the powerful swivel-mounted binoculars which we were allowed to use, we could see the ruins of Courcy below, and beyond that the two front lines, as clearly as possible: beyond them again, La Verrerie, and the wooded, hump-backed hill of Brimont

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just behind to the left. Of the actual fort of Brimont not much remains. Like that of St. Thierry, it was one of a ring of forts defending Reims, but except when momentarily taken by the Russians in April 1917, it had hitherto remained in German hands. From this point it was a common thing to see German working-parties going to and fro behind the lines, and horsemen could be seen on the roads.

From the observation-post at Villers-Franqueux a similar view could be obtained of Brimont, with Loivre in the middle distance, and Bermericourt just beyond the German lines. At St. Thierry we shared a kitchen and cellar with some telegraphists: at Villers-Franqueux we had a long narrow dug-out in a cutting,—a sort of burrow known as "*La Taupinière.*" The G.B.D. aid-post was in the dug-out next to ours: the *brancardiers* and ourselves were *en subsistance* with various batteries or with the different companies of infantry which came out of the trenches for a few days' rest from time to time.

Both from St. Thierry and from Villers-Franqueux, most of the running was to and from the regimental aid-posts which were situated along Route 44, and at one time or another extended from La Neuvillette to Les Carrières, a post in front of Cauroy. These posts changed from time to time: at different periods, our cars evacuated from the Postes known as La Verrerie, Fez, Varsovie, Bruxelles, (Bois Chauffour), Rome (P.C. George) Moulin Dumont, Friedland and Les Carrières.

The wounded and sick were evacuated from the posts to the Triage at Châlons-sur-Vesle.(Amb. 5/10 & 16/2.) From here they were sent on to various hospitals in the district,—most of them known already to our men in connection with the work at Bouleuse. We at this time did all the evacuation work for the 34th Army Corps. The H.O.E. was that of Bouleuse, the road to which climbs up the steep hill-side above Gueux: this hill came

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to be regarded as a sort of test-hill, by which the efficiency of the engines (not to speak of the drivers) was judged. During the snowy weather, the road was frequently very difficult to negotiate, and indeed at times it was more politic to go round by Pargny.

Contagious cases were sent to Sapicourt: patients with head-wounds were usually evacuated straight through to Epernay. This entailed a long and interesting run of some forty kilometers. The road just enters the outskirts of Reims, whose cathedral, standing high among the surrounding houses, could be viewed from a variety of angles. From Reims, the road leads across to the Montagne de Reims: this great hill, which lies between the two big centres of the "Vins de Champagne" industry, Reims and Epernay, and overlooks eastwards the low lying plains of "La Champagne Pouilleuse," is covered with trees, and before the war was a well-known centre for boar-hunting. From the Epernay side of the Montagne, there is a magnificent view: the road winds gently down the slopes which for acres and acres are covered with vineyards: here during the winter months the stakes used for supporting the vines are piled up in V-shaped stacks. A few old men and women might be seen at work, with their baskets on their backs. Beyond these gentle slopes bathed in the afternoon sun, lies the centre of all this industry, Epernay, with its towers and churches rising from the hollow: the river Marne threads the valley, and where at some bend the surface of the water is caught by the sun, the river gleams like molten gold. After a long descent of some kilometers (switch off your engine and run her down in top!) the road crosses the canal and enters the town near the station, where the H.O.E. was. From here the patients were usually sent on to various hospitals in the town.

Towards the end of March, the departure of the 45th Division (which with the 157th formed the 34th Army

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Corps) with some of the Army Corps artillery and hospital units, for the Somme, where the big German push had started, led to a re-organisation of Armies and Army Corps. Henceforth our division belonged to the 38th Corps, and to the VIth instead of the Vth Army. The whole *service de santé* arrangements were forthwith altered. The Triage was now at Chenay, where two cars were stationed: these cars relieved down-coming cars at the front or took evacuation-calls as the case might be. From Chenay, wounded were taken to Ambulance 5/10, which had moved from Châlons to the château at Gueux, where one car was stationed: gassed cases and *malades* of all kinds were sent to Trigny, where Ambulance 16/2 (the other hospital from Châlons-sur-Vesle) was functioning. Here again two cars were stationed: most of the running was from this place. Our clearing-station now became, for a time, the H.O.E. at Montigny: later that at Traméry was opened, and nearly all regular evacuations were made there, many wounded being sent straight down from Chenay to Traméry. Certain cases were sent from Trigny to Faverolles, Sapicourt, Bouleuse, or Jonchery, where there were at least three hospitals.

The G.B.D. was for most of the time in the village of Chenay, where the Médecin Divisionnaire was billeted: for a short period, when Chenay was subjected to fairly frequent bombardment, the Médecin Divisionnaire moved out into a dug-out on the hill-side above the village, and the G.B.D. to a house in the woods along the Chenay-Trigny road. Both, however, afterwards returned to Chenay.

The long period over which our stay in this sector was protracted enabled the convoy to settle down very comfortably in Châlons. Billets, as has already been mentioned, were fairly good. As an outcome of the efforts of a Social Entertainments Committee which met first at Bouleuse, a series of Saturday evening *soirées* was

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arranged. Whist-drives and concerts were the most usual forms of entertainment. Mlle. Guillaume, the village schoolmistress, to whom one of our billets belonged, proved a very good friend in allowing us the use of her piano: this would be moved into our mess-room of an evening, and quite a number of the village-folk, with their children, used to come in for the concerts. Lectures were also delivered from time to time, on various subjects of mechanical or engineering interest: French classes flourished, and a circle was formed for the study and discussion of various social problems. That these activities enjoyed only an ephemeral existence is true: but in the circumstances this was to be expected, and while they lasted they provided a good deal of interest for the winter evenings.

As the weather became warmer, a Natural History Club was formed, and flourished exceedingly until the troublous times upon which we entered after leaving the sector. Informal open-air sing-songs became the order of the day, and of an evening quite a crowd of French soldiers and village-folk would gather round one of the buses, in which sat T.B. with his guitar, or H.E.M. with his one-string violin, surrounded by the convoy choristers. The sport of sliding which the little village square had witnessed in the colder months was succeeded by football: usually only just a kick-about (quite enough to amuse the French); but occasional matches were arranged against French teams,—chiefly artillerymen. These matches were mostly played "at home," on a piece of ground towards Trigny, near a battery of heavies. At one of the few "away" matches, our team was most hospitably entertained: in fact, tales could be told of one or two players . . .

It was at Châlons-sur-Vesle that the first number of the convoy magazine appeared, under the title of "The Marche Toujours."—a name which its subsequent history

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hardly justified. It was started chiefly by the efforts of S.H.H. and G.N.H., and provided a good deal of interest and amusement while it lived. Another activity of the convoy at this time was the cultivation of an allotment just outside the village, at which members were besought to put in a few hours' work during their spare time: various vegetables soon began to crop up, and it was not our fault that we left the sector before we could reap the benefit of our exertions. (The allotment was sold to our successors, S.S.A. 20, and shortly afterwards passed into German possession for nearly two months.) The work at Châlons was always carried out by alternate shifts of cars: and when running was fairly slack, it was not difficult to arrange walks in the neighbourhood which, particularly to nature-lovers, was one of great interest. From the little pine-crested hill which rose immediately above our billets, a good view could be obtained of Reims and her cathedral at the head of the valley: and several members of the convoy at various times ran the gauntlet of the French sentries and gendarmes, and penetrated in to the great "martyr-city" of France: wandered up the Rue de Vesle and round the cathedral and ruined Archbishop's Palace: or through the deserted streets of the Faubourg Cerès: or on past the Hôpital Civile and the Eglise St. Rémi by the French third line to the Caves Pommery, where within 1800 yards of the German trenches this great Champagne establishment carried on its work in the enormous underground cellars and galleries which run for many kilometers beneath the city. Here in one cellar alone were stacked one million bottles: through their midst passed a long gallery leading to the French first line trenches: so that in the event of enemy artillery activity these cellars could be used as communication trenches. Nearly two hundred workmen and women were employed daily in this place up to the time when the town was evacuated: they spent practically the whole of their life underground.

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It was at the end of March, 1918, that the town was officially evacuated of all civilians: even then, men were allowed to remain to look after the cellars of the big wine-merchants. For several days the Epernay road witnessed the sad passage of cart-load after load of domestic goods and chattels with the owners perched on top of piles of bedding, or perhaps walking at the horse's head. Military lorries were plying between the two towns, evacuating women and children. It seemed hard that after living through three and a half years of frequent bombardment close to the lines, these people should be forced after all to abandon their homes: yet the wisdom of the order was amply justified by subsequent events, of which more anon.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Châlons, the high ridge known as the "Massif de Chenay" was always well worth a visit. The Reduite de Chenay and the Fort de St. Thierry were seething with batteries, which used to bombard the opposing fortress of Brimont. From the observation-posts on the ridge, a detailed view could be obtained of the lines: and at night the guns all along this ridge would blaze forth in a *feu de barrage* which to the onlooker provided a magnificent spectacle.

On the whole, of all the sectors which we worked under normal conditions of "peace-time warfare," the Châlons-sur-Vesle sector was probably the most interesting. During the period when we were there, several events took place which affected us nearly, both in the domestic economy of the convoy's life and externally. On February 7th Lieutenant Piot left us: he had been with us since Bussy-le-Château, and we were all sorry when he received orders for Salonika. We were glad that Bruckert, his popular French driver, stayed on with us. Piot's place was taken by Lieutenant Bordes. It was in February, too, that a number of Italian labour battalions turned up in our neighbourhood: the first few days of

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their arrival saw deep and earnest conversations in progress between the "Italianos" and our fellows: it is true that we never got much further than "Come sta?" or "buona notte,"—expressions which we had no idea how to pronounce, still less to write: but they form a good solid basis for a morning's fraternising.

Meanwhile a big change in our internal economy was effected through a sweeping democratic measure brought in by A. Pearson. To understand this, we must go back for a moment to the early days at Coxyde. At that time, the personnel of the convoy was much smaller: a man to cook, with another man to help with the washing-up, etc., was all that was needed in the way of "orderlies." These men in their turn became drivers, and were replaced by new men in the kitchen: and for a time the system worked well enough. But the time came when all the cars were provided with drivers: the convoy was at its full strength as far as the number of the cars was concerned, and it was but rarely that a new driver was required. The numbers were by this time more than double what they had been, and the amount of orderly work to be done increased proportionately. It had long ago been seen that regular and more or less permanent cooks were a *sine qua non*, if the fiasco of the first winter down south was not to be repeated: and since May 1917, these had been secured. But of the orderly work a small handful of "spare-drivers" had hitherto enjoyed the monopoly: moreover, these unfortunate wights had to look forward to the prospect of orderly-work until the end of their days,—or at least until the end of the war which at that time seemed to mean the same thing. At Châlons-sur-Vesle, then, it was decided that in future all members of the convoy should take their turn at orderly work. Looking back, it seems now incredible that things should ever have been otherwise. The old system not only bore hardly upon the "spare-driver,"—it certainly tended also

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to draw an inevitable dividing line between spare-drivers and drivers,—or roughly between the senior members of the convoy and the new-comers. Though many were at first doubtful of the wisdom of this change, few if any would now deny that it was entirely beneficial to the good-working and general well-being of the convoy. The new relations between drivers and spare-drivers led to far greater efficiency, of which the benefits were reaped later: so that in a report handed in during the May retreat, one of the senior members wrote that "at this critical time the convoy system of spare-drivers has been shown to be the only possible system for efficiency."

In March the front began to liven up a bit: rumours of the "spring offensive" were in the air, this as in other years, but it was not clear which side would deliver the first blow. A tentative German attack along a front of twenty kilometers or more wakened up the Fort St. Thierry guns (March 1st-2nd): there were said to be no less than forty batteries (all heavies) on this hill, and the noise of the barrage that night was terrific. As an after-math of this attack, which did not develop into anything serious, the Germans put over a good deal of gas, our post at Villers-Franqueux coming in for a lot of attention: one or two of our men had an unpleasant dose of it, partly owing to faulty gas-masks, and partly to the unusual duration of the bombardment.

At length it became evident that the Germans were definitely taking the offensive, though not in our part of the line: and when the big Somme push was started and the drive on Amiens begun, we could hear the continuous roar of the guns 80 or 100 kilometers away,—a low, reverberating thunder rolling right across the Chemin des Dames plateau, which we could see clearly on our left. Still nothing much happened on our immediate front: and there was a feeling on the convoy (entirely dispelled since) that we were "missing the fun." Towards the end of

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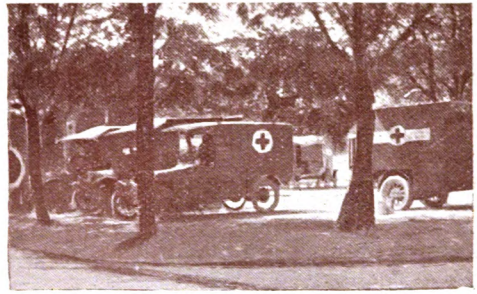

Châlons-sur-Vesle, 1918.

Aid Post, Villers-Franqueux, 1918.

Villers-Franqueux.

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March, things were temporarily livened up by a lot of shelling well behind the lines. Muizon (Gare) always came in for a fair amount of attention in this way, both on account of the railhead, and also because of the proximity of the heavy rail-guns (305 mm. and 370 mm. calibre) between Muizon and Trigny. But at the beginning, and again now at the end of this month, nearly all the surrounding villages—Pouillon, Merfy, Chenay, Gueux—were spasmodically shelled: and presently Châlons-sur-Vesle was allotted its due share. Forthwith dug-outs hitherto unknown were discovered in the hill-side and elsewhere, and thither many men transferred their bedding for a night or two. On the afternoon of March 31st several crumps landed all round the billets and the square where the cars were parked: one or two buses were slightly hit, and a big shell landed within three yards of No. 4 billet; but the only casualty sustained was that of H.W.F., who happened to be shaving at the time, and (not without some show of excuse) cut his chin! The patients in the hospital were either evacuated by our cars, or (in the case of the *intransportables*) moved into a spacious dug-out in the hill-side; here, too, a number of dug-outs were allotted to the civilian population.

The chief event of the first half of April was the burning of Reims: this began on April 11th, and for a week or so the city was on fire: at times the flames would die down, and again they would burst forth with renewed vigour from several quarters of the town. At night the view of the fire from the ridge above the village of Chenay was one never to be forgotten: trees and houses were silhouetted against the red glow: while from the Witry forts, on the hill-side beyond the town, came the flash of the German guns as they sent out a tornado of incendiary shells. By day the most striking thing was the huge column of smoke which rose from the town and drifted over the valley for several kilometers, like some

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black streamer or pennon flown from the doomed city. As a result of this fire almost all that was inflammable in the central part of Reims was destroyed: the Cathedral did not suffer much, except in so far as the heat tended to widen any existing cracks in the stone-work, but such places as the Maison des Musiciens and the old wood-built houses in the market place were demolished.

As it did not appear likely that we were going to leave the neighbourhood for some time, a depôt for spare-kit, including all winter equipment, etc., was started at Epernay in April. With the finer weather various outside interests grew up, not the least of which were the boating expeditions on the River Vesle. The old boats which were kept, mostly half-submerged, down by the Moulin Compensé (to be used as pontoons should occasion arise) proved to be more or less sea-worthy, and to fix up seats and improvise oars was the work of a moment. A series of these river-trips culminated in a memorable expedition to Reims by water: a start was made immediately after lunch: a bathe and an excellent tea were included in the afternoon's programme: and after negotiating locks and weirs and bridges and barbed-wire entanglements and all sorts of obstacles, the party finally arrived at the sentry-guarded bridge at Reims. The return journey by moon-light was delightful,—the more so because the current was now favourable instead of adverse.

It was in May, not long before we left Châlons-sur-Vesle, that several divisions of the Fifth British Army came down to take over the sector on our left: the 21st and 50th Divisions were all round Trigny, and detached British units appeared at various outlying villages. They had just been through a very heavy time in the Kemmel district, and had been sent down for a rest to a "quiet sector": in the light of after-events we can see that they could hardly have been sent to a worse part of the line.

Meanwhile we at length heard that the 157th Division

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was to come out of the trenches: they had been in the sector, with only a fortnight's *repos*, for nearly a year. Just before they left, the Germans caused a lot of casualties by sending over a lot of gas-shells from Trench Mortars in the Cavaliers de Courcy region: the gas used was of that peculiarly horrible breed which combined the ill-effects of mustard-gas with those of various other kinds. The bombardment took place very early in the morning, and for the rest of that day (May 17th) our cars were busy evacuating the gas-cases from the *Verrerie* at La Neuvillette down to Chenay and Trigny. The number of casualties was considerable, and a very large number of them proved fatal.

After some uncertainty, as a result of which we got all packed up and ready to go the previous day, we finally received orders to move on May 21st to Limé. The move was complicated by the necessity of evacuating some three hundred *grippe* cases first: an epidemic had broken out in the division, and there were at least that number unable to march. Our cars fetched the men from various places, —Pouillon, Fort St. Thierry, etc., where in the early morning of a broiling hot day the men were lined up and packed into the cars, ten to a load. They all had to be transported to Fismes (a distance of 25 kilometers), where H.E.M. was supervising the unloading of the cars and the handing over of the men to the *Major de Cantonnement* in the Place de l' Hôtel de Ville. These evacuations necessitated more than one journey for almost all the cars, and all that morning we were passing and re-passing one another along the dusty Fismes road.

S.S.A. 20 turned up to relieve us during the morning, and took over our billets: so that the crowd and confusion in the little square, what with all our cars and all theirs, as well as our stores, kit, etc., was very considerable. However, most of our loading was finished soon after lunch: and at length after bidding farewell to our village

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friends, particularly the infantile population, we lined up along the Muizon road, and forthwith started for Limé. The journey was very dusty, but not eventful. We followed the main road nearly all the way, passing through Jonchery and Fismes; only turning off at Bazoches, a few kilometers from our destination. We passed under Mont Notre Dame, with the old church standing right on the hill-top, and so along past the British C.C.S. to Limé. Here there were at first no billets: we parked the cars that evening in an orchard on the edge of the village: set out the tables on the grass: and then ran down to a streamlet at the bottom of the field, where we contrived to remove from our persons some of the outer deposits of accumulated dust: and so to bed in or alongside the cars.

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A Sing-Song.

I CAN picture it now,—the long, low mess-room, doubtfully lit by a leaky acetylene lamp hung in the centre and a few candles at one end, where, resplendent in the glow of freshly-applied furniture-polish, with which its long-lapsed acquaintance was now renewed, stood Mademoiselle's piano.

In the stalls behind the orchestra were the O.C. and the French staff, together with the guests from the village; in the pit and the gallery were crowded the rest of the Convoy; while outside could be heard the shrill barking of "Boy" sounding the death-knell of some rat.

The pride in Mademoiselle's face showed her appreciation of Topsy's opening solo; and I doubt if even in its palmiest days her piano ever turned out more melodious sounds. But for many of the old favourite songs we had to fall back on the orchestra,—the spirited twang of Briquet's guitar and the sonorous wail of Milly's one-string fiddle. That is the only accompaniment to which I ever heard John Tip's masterpiece "Marie Louise" rendered (with interjections by the chorus): while "Roger Rum," "Cecil," and "Mr. Baggy Breeches" would sound quite unfamiliar with a piano.

It was on this occasion that Arch made his first public appearance, and with his calabash pipe in his hand, ready to be popped back directly his task was

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finished, he gave us "Mother McChree." The French guests were catered for by the Abbot and Sammy who sang "Madelon,"—the only French song I have heard with a really good swing.

Recitations were generally conspicuous by their absence: but few will forget John B. D.'s dramatic rendering of Kipling's "If" on this occasion!

Many a time on the stage I have heard "If you were the only Girl in the World"—but never in the "free and easy" comical style immortalised by Joel and Pru. "The Young Recruit" was Sammy's best (particularly that sustained top-note!), and Lockeye's "I've been to the Pictures" was ever a favourite. No sing-sông could be regarded as complete without a selection of verses from "Rassemblement,"—or rather *all* the verses, rendered unexpurgated by Reginald Pardoe! "Good-Night, Ladies" brought the proceedings to a close; and as the last note of the fiddle faded away, we could still hear in the distance that high-pitched bark which generally denoted that the rat's last moment was at hand.

As I look back now to those sing-songs at Bussy, Passy-Grigny, Bouleuse, Châlons-sur-Vesle, with their informality, their free and easy atmosphere, I feel I would rather hear one of them over again, any day, than go and listen to some Albert Hall star: but then I suppose that (like most of us) I could hardly be called musical.

—R.P.Y.

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Chapter VI.

THE RETREAT TO THE MARNE

EARLY next morning most of the cars were required again at Fismes, to distribute the 300 *malades* once more amongst their various regiments: there were scattered over the surrounding villages, the division being now on reserve. We had reason to remember the ravages of *la grippe* before we had finished with these evacuations. At Fismes the cars were divided into two lots, some evacuating through Braisne to Brenelle, others to Dhuizel and the surrounding villages up on the plateau.

Meanwhile the American convoy, attached to the division which was being replaced by the 157th, left their billets in the grounds of the château at Limé, and on the 23rd we moved in. We now had two sleeping-huts, and for mess-room there was the ample shelter provided by an avenue of tall trees a hundred yards from the château. Here the tables were set out in a woodland glade: and at night we were serenaded to sleep by the song of the nightingales from the woods up the hill-side, or kept awake, as the case might be, by the much nearer and withal less harmonious strains of the frogs in the château-moat.

The general impression was that we were likely to stay in Limé for perhaps a week, and then a long journey up the line was anticipated, Belgium being mentioned as

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our probable destination. Work on the cars forthwith proceeded fairly satisfactorily: while for the long evenings, there were delightful walks in the surrounding country, which is very pretty and at that season looked perhaps at its prettiest. Mont Notre Dame, Braisne, Cerseuil and many other places were visited,—places that we were shortly to know under very different conditions. Limé bade fair to rival Vanault-le-Châtel as a good "repos-centre."

It was on the evening of Sunday, May 26th, just as we were returning to the billet for supper, that A. Pearson, our O.C., took our breath away by the announcement that he had received orders to be in readiness to move in an hour and a half. No details were given, no destination specified: but it was pretty evident that "something big" was in the wind. Followed two of the most hectic hours the convoy ever spent: there were all the steward's stores and motor stores to be loaded up, as well as personal kit, etc: furthermore,—a much more serious matter,—there were a number of cars in a semi-dismantled state, and gear-boxes and other such integral parts had to be put up again in record time. Before 8 o'clock, however, the cars were all "on the road" and lined up along the little village street. The G.B.D. had also received the *alerte*, but knew no more than we did what was happening. A long period of delay and uncertainty ensued: where were we going? Was it the French or the Germans attacking? What were we waiting for? Still we waited in the darkness, and still no further orders came. Gradually men dropped off to sleep where they could,—some in their buses, others in an empty hut near by. About midnight a terrific bombardment began up the line,—a long continuous roar, the thunder of the guns. It was the Boche who was attacking,—that at any rate was clear: the shells came whistling through the night air, bursting in and about Braisne, a mile and a half away. Before the

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night was much older, some of our cars were already evacuating wounded from the shelled town. Presently gas-shells began coming in, and we had to put masks on: in the hut the silence was broken by the rhythmical clicking of the mask-valves as men breathed in and out.

Daylight found us still at Limé. The division had been rushed up to the front (some 20 kilometers away) during the night: but beyond the evacuations from Braisne, no wounded had yet been fetched. About 7 o'clock a number of cars were sent up to fetch the *grippe* cases from the villages to which we had taken them a few days previously. This necessitated passing through Braisne, which was still being subjected to fairly heavy shell-fire. Already the place showed unmistakeable signs of the night's bombardment: telegraph posts and wires across the road, branches of trees, débris from the house-roofs encumbered the streets. The contrast between the state of the place on this fateful morning of May 27th, and the scene it had presented a couple of evenings before, was very striking: then the streets had been thronged with French soldiers and civilians, and all the shops and cafés were doing a roaring trade: now the whole place was absolutely deserted,—not a soul to be seen. The inhabitants were mostly in the cellars, the bombardment having come on too suddenly for them to effect an escape. It was at Brenelle, on the edge of the high plateau land beyond the Vesle river, that we heard from a French straggler the first news of this new German push: he reported that the Boches were pouring over: that after a terrific bombardment of H.E. and gas, they were carrying all before them: and that Ostel had already fallen. The villagers were much dismayed, particularly when they heard that a few kilometers away refugees were already taking to the roads. These evacuations kept most of the cars busy during the early part of the morning. It was whilst passing through

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Braisne, with two or three other cars, that N. E. Gripper's bus was hit: Gripper was killed instantaneously, and Hugo Jackson, who was with him at the time, was so badly wounded that he succumbed shortly after reaching hospital. The driver of the car just in front had a very narrow escape. "The next shell followed immediately," he writes, "and fell directly in front of N. E. Gripper's car, who was following close behind. The explosion was terrific: it seemed to lift the bus forward." Perhaps this is hardly the place for a detailed obituary notice: suffice it to say that everyone on the convoy felt a deep sense of personal loss in the death of these two men who, only an hour or two previously, had been eagerly discussing with the rest of us, over a cup of coffee and a plateful of porridge, what the day might bring forth. They were buried during the afternoon by an English chaplain at the casualty clearing station below Mont Notre Dame.

Meanwhile, the wounded began to pour down, and the G.B.D. rushed up to the Ferme de Pinson, between Longueval and Vauxcéré, where an attempt was made to set up an aid-post. A number of our cars were sent there; and others went on to Longueval, just this side of the Aisne, to pick up some wounded who had been left there. Indeed, these cars had received orders to proceed to Bourg-et-Comin, but on arrival at Longueval were told that Bourg-et-Comin was already in German hands. Another car was sent to Brenelle once more, and fetched a number of wounded from the caves or quarries in the hill-side. The Germans by this time were advancing very rapidly: the roads were crowded with hundreds of refugees from the villages, who were trying to get a few of their household goods away in bullock-drawn waggons, or anything else they could get hold of, down to hand-carts and wheel-barrows: wandering live-stock became entangled in up-going columns of artillery, and the confusion was awful. To make matters worse, the

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Germans seemed to be having everything their own way in the air, and their 'planes were flying low down a hundred feet or so above the roads, machine-gunning them at will, with never a shot fired to keep them off except by the French infantrymen along the road-side. It was a weird sensation to hear the deafening "tac-tac-tac" just overhead: to look up and see those two sinister black Maltese crosses: to watch the German observer swivel round his down-pointing maxim on the men who were crouching in the ditches either side of the road, trying in vain to find shelter.

It was not long before the G.B.D. moved back to the village of Paars. The Ferme de Pinson was reported to have been burnt out shortly afterwards; and from other reports it appears probable that some of our cars at Longueval were surrounded by the German advanced patrols on three sides just before they left. From Paars one or two cars were ordered to remove a few of the refugees out of the zone of immediate danger, in the neighbourhood of Vauxceré and Paars: they loaded up with women and children, and evacuated them back as far as Mont Notre Dame. Other cars were sent to Dhuizel and to a farm near Vieil Arcy, known as the Ferme de la Montagne. None of those who were there are likely to forget the aspect which this high plateau presented on May 27th. Besides the constant menace of the 'planes, the roads were continually under H.E. and shrapnel fire: here and there lay dead horses, obstructing the fairway: batteries were firing from open positions, sometimes at only a few hundred yards range. From the Aisne valley rose a column of smoke, as the Germans set fire to some village: elsewhere a great explosion rent the air, as the French blew up a munition dump before abandoning the place. Over a small village in the hollow numerous little white puffs of smoke told of the deadly barrage to which the place was being subjected.

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At the Ferme de la Montagne, shells were whistling over at the rate of three or four a minute: happily most of them went over by a few yards, but several fell in the farmyard itself. The last car to leave had to "tank" over a heap of bricks and rubble which had been brought down in the gateway a moment previously. Strange as it seemed, the peasant-folk on the farm had not left: they stayed all through the bombardment and awaited the arrival of the Germans. After all, the Boche might not come, and anyhow . . . "Que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre." A whole philosophy of life is summed up in those simple words, which were so frequently heard in Northern France during the four terrible years of war. One car was sent on from the farm to an advanced post, where three *blessés* were said to have been left earlier in the morning. Here again the road was being heavily shelled: sinister-looking columns of black smoke, with showers of stones and dirt, sprang up, like geysers, on this side and on that: overhead the shrapnel burst with an ugly sound: on the road, the machine-gun bullets raised little spirts of dust round the car. Fighting was going on in the Aisne valley, a few hundred yards below, where the drifting smoke and general chaos betokened the position of "the line": behind that, the German batteries could be seen firing from the hill-side beyond the Aisne. Vieil-Arcy, the village in the hollow, was burning. . . . The dug-out was found to be empty: the driver returned forthwith, strongly convinced of the wisdom of a remark made by a regimental stretcher-bearer who was acting as guide, "Faut faire le demi-tour: faut pas s' amuser içi, tu sais!" The journey was not entirely in vain, for a load of wounded was picked up off the roads as the car returned.

The wounded were evacuated to Mont Notre Dame: and here a long queue of waiting ambulances stretched for some hundreds of yards,—French and British Army

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ambulances, our own cars, and a number of lorries full of sitting cases. The 50th British Division was in the sector on our right: a British C.C.S. was functioning alongside the French H.O.E. at Mont Notre Dame: nurses, doctors, orderlies and chaplains were toiling incessantly, aided by some Italian stretcher-bearers, yet still were unable to cope with the never-ending stream of wounded. The place fell into German hands in the evening, and hundreds of wounded had eventually to be abandoned.

Late that afternoon, the convoy base was shifted back to Cuiry-Housse. There were still the *grippe* cases to be evacuated; they were taken to Lesges, and this was the last we saw of them. That evening most of the cars turned up at Cuiry-Housse: the *Direction* of the divisional medical service had completely collapsed, and though our cars were still bringing down a few wounded from different places, no attempt was made to organise a regular service. We felt that, though of necessity many wounded had to be abandoned owing to the swiftness of the enemy's advance, we could have saved many more than we did if less time had been devoted to saving the G.B.D. *materiel* and more to the collection of wounded.

For many of us, a hurried supper in a barn at Cuiry-Housse was the first rest and the first food we had had all day: we exchanged notes on the experiences of the day: where we had been, what was happening, how near the Germans were, or had been, and so on: and speculated as to the probable fate of R.S.C., who had been in hospital at Courville, near Fismes, with a broken arm as a result of a motor smash. (Though we had no news of him for some time after, we eventually learned that he got away on foot.[1]) Then there were tyres to change, and cars to

[1] The hospital at Courville was partially evacuated during the day, but it was not till 10 p.m. that the remaining cases received orders to go to St. Gilles. The hospital here, however, was nearly empty: an outburst of rifle firing and grenades, on the Mont St. Martin, some 600 yards away, accelerated their return to Courville. About midnight the Médecin-Chef told them it was a case of "sauve qui peut," and

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load up again: we had to leave behind a lot of stores, kitchen utensils, etc. (Some pots of paint which we left here were found again, emptied of their contents, in the early days of August, after the German retirement.) A more serious loss was that of the convoy library, which during our prolonged stay at Châlons-sur-Vesle had swollen to quite a considerable size. We had visions of some serious-minded, be-spectacled Hun brooding over Stephen Leacock's "Nonsense Novels" next day, and shaking his head over the ways of the mad English.

The evening was passed in a state of tension, waiting for orders to move. From the noise of the machine-gun fire, it was clear that the enemy was not far: Limé had been shelled early in the evening, and was said already to have been abandoned. It was not till after midnight that we pulled out of the little village in the hollow and up on to the crowded main-road. We turned in almost immediately to spend a cold night amongst the straw under a big open-sided barn. At 5 a.m. the next morning (May 28th) we were on the move again: our departure was expedited by the close proximity of the machine-gun firing behind us. Meanwhile, we were rejoined by two of the three cars which had been on the road all night in and about Fère-en-Tardenois: they had been put at the disposal of a French captain, but he proved to be an incompetent fool and led them a wild-goose chase in and out of the ceaseless streams of traffic in Fère. (Finally No. 80 had sheared a key-way in the back hub, and at one time it looked as if the car would have to be abandoned: but eventually she was towed in, and the key-way temporarily packed up.) We made forthwith for Arcis-St. Restitué, where a

they started off on an all-night tramp, relying for food on what they had been able to secure by way of loot from deserted houses. They trekked down through Arcis-le-Ponsart, and across country to Coulonges, where they struck the main-road to Fère-en-Tardenois. Here after a long wait, during which an enemy 'plane dropped a bomb on a waggon alongside the hospital train, they were eventually packed into a train and evacuated to Paris.

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relieving division of infantry had just arrived and was already deploying across the fields in open formation. At Cramaille we had a snatch of breakfast, while endless streams of lorries, driven by Annamites, were rushing fresh troops up into the line. Our next stop was at Villeneuve-sur-Fère, where we parked in a field just outside the village.

The same afternoon several cars were sent back to Arcis-St. Restitué, where a few of the Divisional wounded were still coming in. All cases were brought down from the line (in so far as there was any definite line) by stretcher-bearers, German prisoners being employed on this job: we watched them coming down the Braisne road into the square, and round the corner to the aid-post. Meanwhile, the French soldiery were indulging in an orgy of looting, a wine shop offering special attractions to these lovers of *pinard*.[1] A small stock of sugar appealed more to our men. Most of the civilians left during the day, though here as elsewhere a few remained to await the Germans: indeed, from talks with the inhabitants of some of these villages after their liberation later in the year, one was inclined to think that on the whole those who stayed behind suffered less than the refugees who fled.

It was late in the afternoon when the first big shells landed in the square: after the first crash as the bits of steel sang through the air, everyone in the place scuttled for shelter like rabbits in a warren: in five seconds the square was empty. The bombardment continued, and presently we received orders to clear out. One of our cars was carrying the kitchen and cooks of the Etat-Major, the rest Etat-Major or G.B.D. personnel. At first we moved only to a wood just outside; here we spent a miserably cold night by the roadside, tied to the apron-strings of Divisional H.Q., which at that time consisted of the General's limousine a couple of hundred yards down

1 The name given by the French soldiers to their ration-wine.

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the road. All that night we lay in a ditch shivering, within a couple of feet of the artillery columns which were passing up and down continually; while the noise of the shells bursting in and around Arcis alternated with the firing of a 6-inch battery which was letting loose the other side of the wood. German 'planes were overhead, and after each big flash from the battery we wondered whether the position would be discovered and shelled. Early next morning we moved out of the wood and down by Beugneux (hereabouts we passed a French aerodrome that had been bombed out of existence) and Oulchy-le-Château to the little village of Armentières. We were still with the Etat-Major: and from here a couple of cars were sent in to Fère-en-Tardenois to fetch Etat-Major *materiel*. The Fère-en-Tardenois—Dormans road was hardly passable owing to the stream of down-going traffic: while in the fields on either side were parallel columns of retiring infantry. In the town all was confusion: the Germans were supposed to be within three kilometers, and advancing rapidly: everyone was clearing out as fast as the state of the roads permitted: the civilians were in a state of panic, and it was indeed difficult not to believe that this was a complete rout. Meanwhile the French were blowing up munition-dumps: huge bursts of flame rose a hundred feet into the air or more, followed by a most terrifying report, which shook the whole town like an earthquake, bringing slates, tiles and chimneys rattling down into the streets.

The main body of the convoy had spent a comparatively peaceful night at Villeneuve, but on the morning of the 29th moved back once more. In spite of the congested state of the roads, most of the cars which had become separated from the convoy (a number had been sent to Coincy on evacuations) managed to rejoin the section. We were now well away on the Château-Thierry road, and thought that we were definitely being sent *en*

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arrière, the division having been so cut up as no longer to count as a line unit. We turned off the main-road about fifteen kilometers short of Château-Thierry into a little village called Bézu-St. Germain. Here we had lunch, and were able to devote most of the day to filling up, greasing, mending punctures, and any other running repairs that needed doing.

After the morning's run down from the Fère district, we felt that we had left the fighting well behind us. But before the afternoon was out, the news that Villeneuve (where we had been that morning) was in flames was followed by reports that the Germans were following up rapidly with cavalry-patrols and armoured cars: by the evening they were again in the vicinity. As we look back on it, Bézu is a jumbled recollection of *poilus* and horses, infuriated officers and frightened civilians,—the latter trying to get rid of their remaining stock at any price, and to pack up their most valuable belongings: a few only having the necessary courage (or was it apathy?) to await the arrival of the invader. Looting again commenced,—a sure sign that the place was doomed: all the regular *ravitaillement* service had of course gone by the board, and food-stuffs were at a premium. Wild chases were afoot in the poultry-yards: one or two enterprising individuals tried their hands at milking cows. After the usual delay, orders at length came through for the convoy to start off once more, seven cars being left behind with the G.B.D. and Divisional Etat-Major, and one with the Corps d' Armée staff. We shall hear more of these cars anon: for the present, we will follow the fortunes of the main body.

Daylight was fast waning as we threaded our way out from the crowded village. On the main Château. Thierry road the going was easier, though for some distance there were three lines of traffic, two down and one up-going. After a few kilometers, however, we got clear of this, and (the throttle of the leading car having

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"jammed" in the fully open position!) had a fast run to the hill-top outside Château-Thierry. Here we waited for the Lieutenant to reconnoitre, and then slowly moved on into the town, with frequent stoppages during which we were not altogether comforted by the drone of enemy 'planes flying quite low overhead, the staccato rattle of their *mitrailleuses* punctuated with the explosions of the bombs which they were dropping all over the town. Under the circumstances the snail-like pace was very trying: but once sure of the way across the Marne bridge, we speeded up and soon reached the little village of Nesle-la-Montagne, on the southern slope of the valley. Here we parked our cars by the road-side and turned in, pretty well tired out after a long and trying day.

Next morning (May 30th) we set off once more along crowded roads. The Workshop, with the Overland (suffering from her usual complaint—"back axle gone") in tow, had a narrow escape from being captured at the beginning of this run: the driver (R.P.Y.) missed the sharp turning from Nesle into the main road, and owing to the congestion on the narrow way was unable to rectify this mistake. He was forced to run back into Château-Thierry: the enemy was already reported in the northern outskirts of the town, and was getting uncomfortably near before R.P.Y. finally extricated his bus.

The run from Nesle to the Montmirail—La Ferté-sous-Jouarre road was a truly heartrending experience. The road was packed with traffic, all going south—and such traffic! Men were leading bullock-carts piled up with fodder or odds and ends of furniture, on the top of which sat children and womenfolk: everyone, including old men and women bent with age, had had to leave their homes at a moment's notice, and set their faces to Paris, there to swell the ever increasing stream of penniless refugees from the war zone. Scattered bands of British Tommies—many of them wounded: doctors and nurses, the latter

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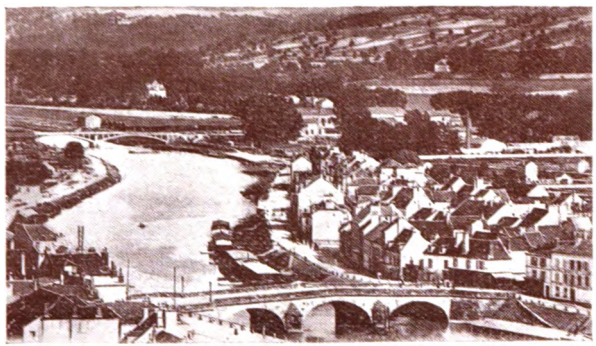
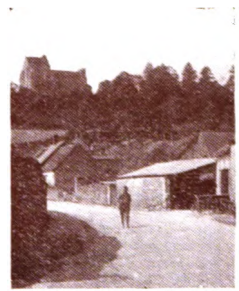
Refugees in the Marne Retreat, May 1918.

"Ditched!" Limé, May 1918.



Château-Thierry, May 29th, 1918.



Mont Notre Dame,
May 1918.

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shod only with thin shoes, having lost all their kit: folk from every station in life, were mingled in that motley throng of homeless fugitives. The sight was made all the harder for our men by reason of their inability to assist: the buses were already overloaded, and many had a few refugees in tow. The sufferings of these poor folk, in all the heat and confusion of that day, can only be surmised. Here and there we passed overturned waggons, which remained there for weeks afterwards: we kept seeing them during our subsequent trips up to the front, on roads by that time deserted and empty.

Once on the main road, progress was much quicker: the road was familiar to many of us, for we had passed along it, though in very different circumstances, rather more than a year before. Finally we drew up on a side road a few kilometers west of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre: this place proved to be full to overflowing with three American Pierce-Arrow convoys, so towards evening we moved into the neighbouring hamlet of Les Corbières, where we spent the night. The civilians here were very interested in *Les Anglais:* the British had been here in September 1914, and one old woman took us to see a British grave which she had carefully tended, putting a rail round and planting flowers. Next day (May 31st) we moved on, and had a pleasant run through a delightful wooded valley. The destination specified to us was Bêcherelle; but we understand that the C.O. was heard muttering between his teeth, after the umpteenth attempt to find the place, "Is it in heaven or is it in hell, that dem'd elusive Bêcherelle?" We eventually drew up by La Trétoire station: here after supper we cheered a crowd of civilians, including a number of refugees, with a convoy sing-song: and later made numerous women and children happy by letting them sleep on the stretchers in our buses. It was the first night they had slept under cover since leaving their homes four or five days previously. We ourselves, after

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a dip in the stream at the bottom of the meadow, placed our stretchers between the trucks in the station yard, "and so to bed."

Next morning after an early lunch, in which Bézu fowl largely figured, we moved on to the Moulin des Brûs at Bellot. Here we were rejoined a little later by the cars which had been left behind three days before at Bézu-St. Germain: before continuing our story, it may be as well to ask the reader to return with us to Bézu, and follow for a space the fortunes of the seven cars which from the night of May 29th were operating more or less independently.

After the departure of the main body of the convoy, these cars[1] were lined up by the roadside at the entrance to the village, behind a rough barricade of carts and wooden fencing which had been hastily thrown up and was guarded by a French patrol. (One car[2] was put at the disposal of the Corps d' Armée staff: and this car remained isolated from the rest until the morning of June 1st, when the driver was at length allowed to rejoin the convoy.) Orders to move were expected any minute: meanwhile the most disquieting rumours were rife. The Germans were by this time within about two kilometers of the village, with nothing to stop their further advance: but apparently their patrols waited for daylight before pushing on. This, of course, we did not at the time know they were going to do: and to stay on, when nothing could be gained by remaining, seemed to be asking for capture. Still no orders came through: the Divisional Etat-Major wanted to retire, but had received no orders from the Corps, and therefore had to stop. Gradually we became resigned to the delay, and even managed to snatch a few hours of fitful sleep: but it was difficult to sleep soundly with troops passing by continuously, and the

[1] Viz., Nos. 61, 64, 1, 73, 74 77 and 79.
[2] No. 75.

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remarks which were passed from one man to another—"Nous sommes perdus," or "c'est fini," were not exactly conducive to our peace of mind. In the morning, A. Pearson turned up from Château-Thierry: he had half expected to find that the cars left behind had been captured. The situation appeared now to be less pressing—perhaps the cold light of day dispelled apprehensions which had loomed large in men's minds overnight. We spent half an hour "looting" the station master's house, if such a term can be applied to operations carried on with the official sanction, and indeed under the personal supervision of a two-star General. (It appears that the said station-master had been engaged for some months past in enriching his private larder at the expense of the French government, and this systematic embezzlement having been discovered was now being arbitrarily rectified.) As we finally left the village, followed by the *Géni* who were the last to leave the place, a 75 *auto-canon* was just getting ready for action by the roadside. Rumour, that lying jade, said that the Germans entered the place five minutes later—a report which so played upon the imagination of one of our number, that he afterwards declared some palpably French cavalry, who were coming down the road as we left, to have been nothing more or less than a Uhlan patrol!

We were informed on fairly good authority that a German armoured car and possibly some of their advanced cavalry patrols were already in Château-Thierry, ahead of us: we therefore made a detour by Epaux-Bézu. In this little village we halted for perhaps half an hour: and in that time the French Etat-Major personnel displayed a truly admirable talent for looting foodstuffs and wine: the cars were well stocked with these in an incredibly short time, which was just as well, as we had no other food but this for two or three days. From Epaux-Bêzu we con-

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tinued by narrow and hilly ways to Belleau and Bouresches (both the scene of heavy fighting afterwards, the Americans making their début there) and so down to the Château-Thierry—Meaux road, which we followed as far as Montreuil-aux-Lions. Here we spent the rest of the day (May 30th), watching the pitiful stream of refugees who were wending their way back across the Marne towards Paris. Whole families passed, perched on piles of bedding, in big waggons drawn by teams of white oxen: others, less fortunate, had to journey on foot. A number of American lorries were engaged on the work of evacuating civilians, but they could only take a minute proportion of the thousands who were on the roads. Montreuil itself was being evacuated, and we had lunch in the kitchen of a recently deserted house, where D.W., our cook-general, found all the utensils and accessories required for the culinary art ready to hand.

About 10 o'clock at night we moved on again: it was a dark night, and the dust made driving "in convoy" very difficult. Add to this the fact that the roads were badly congested, that German 'planes appeared overhead from time to time dropping flares, followed by bombs as soon as the airmen had had time to see their objectives, and that we did not know our route at all: and it will be readily understood that the journey was not an easy or a pleasant one. We ran down the long hill into La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, standing on our brakes: had a glimpse of the Hôtel de Ville, ghostly white, on our left hand: crossed the Marne not without a sense of relief, and turned left along the far side of the river. It was here that we lost our way, and found ourselves going back towards Château-Thierry: lurid glares lit up the night sky ahead of us, showing where some munition dump was burning: Chtâeau-Thierry itself was in flames. We passed patrols of French Lancers going up: soon we saw

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that we were getting back towards the fighting again, and had to turn round in a narrow roadway by the river-side. We returned to La Ferté, and then took the Montmirail road, afterwards turning off to the little village of Hondevilliers, where we arrived, absolutely tired out, at 3 a.m.

Our recollections of Hondevilliers are very pleasant: it was the first place where we got any real sleep and rest. On the 31st we moved into a lane amongst flowery fields: it was a bright sunny day, and we just drank in greedily the peacefulness of the scene. We got a woman in the village to cook a meal for us at mid-day (more Bézu fowl?): in the evening we were able to buy milk and eggs, and split up into two or three parties for feeding. That night we had a full night's rest,—a joy unknown for the past week: and next day, as has been already stated, moved on to rejoin the convoy at Bellot.

The few days we spent at Bellot were quite enjoyable: the cars were billeted in front of the mill, and from here a pathway led through fields white with ox-eye daisies to the village. Two hundred yards away there was an ideal bathing-pool in the mill-stream, where prodigious feats of diving were performed. On the Sunday morning a simple service was held in memory of Hugo Jackson and N. E. Gripper. The past week had been a sort of nightmare: such big happenings had been packed into so short a time that we hardly yet realised it all. From the peacefulness of this June landscape, we looked back to the days of the retreat and all the time preceding it as to something long past, something quite different from our present life. The division was now sadly reduced in numbers: indeed it was practically out of the fight. Some of the 333rd regiment were holding the Marne bridges east of La Ferté, and their *Génie* were busy mining these in case of a further German advance. There was a certain amount of running

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to be done, chiefly by the cars stationed with the G.B.D. at Sablonnières: passwords were the order of the day, particularly up in the region of the bridges, at Nogent l' Artaud and elsewhere—R.W.S. can tell a good yarn about commandants and passwords. But most of the cars and drivers were able to rest, except for one night when a lot of cars were required to take so-called "malades" (equipped, incidentally, with all the impedimenta of a company of *Génie*) up to the bridges. Of this night's work, as of certain other incidents, our O.C. had something to say to the Médecin-Divisionnaire at a subsequent date. Meanwhile, on the morning of June 4th orders to move came through at the typical hour of 2 a.m., and soon after 6 we were en route. We went via Rebais and La Ferté-Gaucher to St. Martin-du-Boschet, where we shared an enormous farm-yard with the G.B.D. Some evacuations had to be made in the course of the afternoon, from Nogent l' Artaud and elsewhere, to Coulommiers—rather a jolly little town, where are the picturesque ruins of an old Capucine monastery. In the evening an informal sing-song amongst the buses drew round quite a number of the G.B.D. *brancardiers* and doctors: "Roger Rum" was followed by "Madelon" and "Les Montagnards," and "Tout le long de la Tamise." The following day we moved on to La Rue, a tiny hamlet a few kilometers from Villenauxe: the cars were parked in two or three farm-yards round about a mill. We expected to remain here for two or three weeks, and settled down leisurely to a good overhaul of the cars. Meanwhile, the country round about was of considerable interest to the adventurous-minded. Villenauxe was a jolly little town: Nogent-sur-Seine well repaid a visit, and some even got as far as Provins, then the G.Q.G. of the French Army. Provins is a particularly delightful town, of very great antiquarian interest. A great in-

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stitution at La Rue was the series of trips made by the Federal to Pont-sur-Seine and other places on the river for bathing. On the whole, in spite of the mosquitoes, which were very active, La Rue was a pleasant spot: and we were none too pleased when on the fifth day we had orders to move once more.

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"How we Lost the Black Jack,"

—OR—

The Lighter Side of the Retreat.

BLACK JACK was damned from the start. The first consignment to arrive on the Convoy had a cold reception as it darkly spread its placid self in the bowls where until then Golden Syrup had always reigned supreme. Protests to Slim were unavailing; and he laid his critics low by telling them he had gone to the utmost length of his influence with H.Q.,—after that, we felt nothing more could be done. Mind you—in spite of its unprepossessing appearance it had, to a slight extent, a small clièntele, but then I defy anyone but an assistant mechanic to eat his porridge neat and enjoy it.

If it had not been for Charlie B., I firmly believe Black Jack would have survived the Retreat, but being a sugar expert he was persuaded to give a lecture on "Sugar refining machinery" to the Engineering class. We were fascinated: our mouths watered as we heard of the various stages sugar passed through down to our beloved Golden Syrup. If the lecture had finished there, all would have been well, but he went further; and the final stage, which he described as a residue containing "all the dregs of sugar refining," was—"Black Jack!" He finished his peroration amid cheers with the cryptic remark—"and that is why I never eat the stuff."

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"How we Lost the Black Jack."

I suppose every convoy has its Black Hand Gang, who, if there is anything to be got rid of or to be (surreptitiously) acquired gratis, are always ready to take on the work. I could see that the Gang were roused in spite of a spirit of Prudence being with them: and Slim, who had a hundredweight still in stock, went to great length in safeguarding the supply. He even obtained a French revolver—and for a time the Gang were foiled.

Then came the Retreat—and with it the opportunity. I saw the case put in, and had we moved off that night it would have gone with us: but in the morning many Ambulances were wanted and it was dumped for the time being and camouflaged. Orders came to move off quickly, and I saw in the faces of the B.H.G. a ray of joyous hope, in spite of the seriousness of the times: but they had reckoned without Pa, who, on returning from the front to look for the Convoy, found we had moved, and with his usual thoroughness looked about to see if anything had been left for any following car to pick up. We had had to leave a great deal; but from a wide and varied selection Pa chose a case of stores. Ten minutes after his rejoining the Convoy at V., there,

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alone in its glory, stood the case of Black Jack. Members of the Gang remonstrated with him but he was too tired to say anything further than "How did I know what was in it?"

In the hurried move next morning the case was put into G.N.H.'s bus: but as he was assistant steward, and had only been married when on leave fourteen days' previously, few hopes were entertained by the Gang.

For five days Slim managed to circumvent their attempts: but at last, unknown to him, it was placed with some Motor stores in the Petrol lorry. The end was in sight—a hurried halt—another Ambulance wanted—room must be found for the stores it was carrying—"Duty first" (ah, wonderful word!) "pleasure after" murmured C., as he and his prudent friend dumped the case of Black Jack from the lorry to make room for cases of petrol out of the emptied ambulance: and so the Convoy moved along again with the never ceasing stream of traffic, refugees and guns. I heard a whisper as the lorry passed the case, "Look the other way, Pru, or you'll see it?"

—R.P.Y.

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Chapter VII.

After the bloody fighting and heavy losses entailed in the Aisne battle, the 157th Division was now bound for the Argonne. Our course lay by Sézanne and then Champaubert, where we passed long columns of cavalry on the move: thence some fast going took us on to Châlons-sur-Marne, which most of us had not visited since the big air-raids which at one time had considerably depleted the number of the inhabitants staying in the town: but beyond a few houses smashed here and there, the place did not appear very much altered. We stopped just outside the town for lunch, and then continued by way of Lépine and La Grande Romaine. It was a relief to get clear of the barren Champagne country, and to find ourselves in the wooded districts of the Argonne, which we entered by Givry, passing thence through the Forêt de Belval to Triaucourt. The Argonne villages have quite a character of their own: the cottages are lath and plaster constructions, built more or less in one continuous row, well back from the road on either side: they have tiled roofs, and eaves projecting two feet or more beyond the house-fronts. From Triaucourt we were sent on to Rembercourt, a depressing place, almost completely

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destroyed in 1914. We had a long wait here, during which some of us put in time visiting the church,—a curious building combining the Gothic and Renaissance styles in an extraordinary way: others contented themselves with cheap beer at the village café. Eventually we had to retrace our course as far as the tiny hamlet of Les Merchines, where we parked the cars in a small field. For those who were not sleeping in buses, there were sleeping billets available in an empty house, where also we had a mess-room, entered from the field through the windows. We only stayed at "Les *Machins*" (as the place came to be called) about four days: there was very little running, though one or two cars went in to Bar-le-Duc. Our time was chiefly spent greasing up again, etc.: while the long evenings gave ample time for walks in the surrounding country. We were in the district which suffered so heavily from the German inroads in 1914: everywhere the waysides and fields are dotted with the little wooden crosses which mark the graves of fallen soldiers. Nearly every village was in ruins: and we were able to see some of the work done by the F.W.V.R. Committee, consisting chiefly of the erection of hutments. We met several "War Vics." from the surrounding villages: a number of our own men had formerly been engaged on this work, and old acquaintances were thus renewed. We also met a number of Yanks in these parts, chiefly men working on the "great American railway" which was constructed to supply the Verdun area.

The Division had meanwhile been re-formed: the 214th and 252nd regiments had been broken up, and two regiments of American black troops (371st and 372nd) were now *endivisionnés* with the old 333rd French infantry regiment. On June 13th the division, thus constituted, moved up to the Rarécourt sector, and we followed the next day. From Beauzée onwards, our road led up the valley of the Aire river, Rarécourt being a small village

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just off the main-road not many kilometers south of Clermont-en-Argonne. Billets at Rarécourt were "nothing to write home about": the 157th was relieving an Italian division (the famous "Garibaldi" Division), and the Italian ambulance drivers had not left their billets in an altogether sanitary state, particularly the mess-room. This was a long narrow cart-shed, which by dint of much cleaning was rendered just habitable.

The Italian drivers struck us as being very much more efficient and keener on their job than the French Automobile Service: indeed, we were favourably impressed with all the troops of this 8th Italian Division. We had perhaps formed an unfair estimate of the Italians from our experience of their Labour Battalions. For the first two or three evenings, their divisional band used to give performances in the village, below the high wall of the church-yard. Here a mixed crowd of Italians, Frenchmen and Englishmen gathered to hear the music: and as the late sun shone down on the village square of an evening, with the long line of the Argonne Forest showing in the distance, the scene was rather a striking one. The officers of the Italian Etat-Major, including their General, a grandson of Garibaldi, came out to listen to the music: after the Marseillaise, they always played "Tipperary" out of compliment to us, and were evidently under the impression that this was the British National Anthem: for nearly all the Italian officers, as well as a number of Frenchmen, stood at the salute whilst it was being played.

The Rarécourt sector was a very quiet one, though a sense of uneasiness prevailed owing to the expectation of a heavy German attack in those parts. At this time the Allies believed Germany to be preparing to follow up her Chemin-des-Dames attack with another desperate push, but were uncertain where the blow would be delivered. The villages near the front in these parts were at one time evacuated, and all material such as agricultural im-

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pliments, etc., were removed to a safe distance in the rear.

We had at first three aid-posts, two in and one just on the left of the Fôret de Hesse,—a part of the great Argonne forests. The Poste Pasteur, the most easterly of these three, was in a big wood south of Avocourt: it was reached by way of Parois and Aubréville, whence a tortuous road led up through the forest. It was curious to approach this forest from the south, where the trees were untouched, and gradually to work through to the north side, where all the trees were stunted and mutilated, and the shell-holes were touching one another for hundreds of yards. At the time of the Verdun attack, these woods saw some very heavy fighting: indeed from the Poste Pasteur a short walk brought you to the ruined village of Esnes, which is in the hollow below the famous *Côte* 304 and *le Mort Homme*, whose slopes were pock-marked with shell-holes as though Earth's face were disfigured with some fell disease. From the Poste Pasteur our cars used to go on to the Poste Morigny, nearer the edge of the wood: further than that we could not go, since the far side of the wood was under the direct observation of the Germans in Montfaucon, whose church and houses could be seen perched high on the hill-top beyond the Avocourt wood. There was, however, very little running from this or indeed from any post, and it was no unusual thing for a car to stay up there two or three days. The post was given up on June 24th, when it was taken over by the division on our right.

The central post was at Camp Dervin, on a wooded hill-side right in the middle of the forest. Very few wounded were picked up there: most were fetched from the Post Hermon, further up the Avocourt road. Other posts served from Camp Dervin were the Patte d' Oie and La Barricade; the latter lay at the foot of the hill known as le Mamelon Blanc, about 900 yards from the front line,

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and was reached by a road which at one point passed within 500 yards of the German trenches. This corner was known by the very attractive name of "Tournant de la Mort." It was very rarely, however, that any of our cars went to this post, and in any case the sector was always quiet while we were there. The chief interest at Camp Dervin was provided by the American "darkie" troops, to whom reference has already been made. The extraordinary and child-like simplicity of many of these niggers produced some very amusing conversations: they had no notion of whom or what they were fighting for or against. Their ideas of what a German was like, and what they were to do if they saw one, were fantastic in the extreme. They are really only a half developed race, and there seems something sinister and almost criminal in transporting such folk across the Atlantic to embroil them in the welter of our European wars. The third aid-post was at Neuvilly, a little village on the Clermont—Varennes road. To reach it, we had to pass through Clermont-en-Argonne, a village picturesquely situated on the edge of the forest, at the foot of a pine-topped hill: the ruined church, with its apsidal east end, formed a very striking picture, built as it was on a sort of ledge half way up. From the top of this hill, a fine view could be obtained on a clear day over the woods in the plain below, where lay the front lines. The direct road from Clermont to Neuvilly, which ran straight as a die through flat, open country, was not used by daylight, except for very urgent cases, a longer way round by Aubréville being followed. The aid-post was in the cellar of a house just above a weir: in the pool below fishing and even bathing were enjoyed at various times—sure sign of a quiet sector—while the G.B.D. sergeant rather fancied himself as a rat-shooter. The place used occasionally to be bombarded somewhat viciously: but the advanced Poste Forimont, some kilometers ahead, was more often shelled than

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Neuvilly itself. This advanced post could only be approached at night-time.

The front work was organised in three-day shifts: a Relay-Post was instituted at Auzéville where three buses were on duty and relieved cars as they came down from the posts. *Blésses* were taken to the Ambulance 6/13 at Salvange, a château just off the Bar-le-Duc road: here most officers were kept, other ranks being sent on to Froidos or to the H.O.E. at the big rail-head of Fleury-sur-Aire. One or two cars were also on duty at Rarécourt for evacuatory work either from camps in the surrounding districts, or from the Divisional *ambulances* at Rarécourt to the H.O.E.

The G.B.D. was at an outlying farmstead called Grange Lecomte[1]; and here as usual one car was stationed, attached to the Médecin-Divisionnaire. (It became the usual thing for the Médecin-Divisionnaire to have the use of one of the Ambulance cars practically as a touring-car; indeed, it may generally be assumed unless otherwise stated that D.W. and his car were in this way attached to the G.B.D.) There were a number of "darkies" billeted here, and the writer well remembers an evening spent listening to them "playing on the old banjo"—in this case, T.B.'s guitar. Their singing has quite a character of its own: it consists of a very simple sort of sing-song melody, full of repetitions: there is not much tune, but a melancholy, rhythmic cadence. The faces they made as they sang were often (quite unconsciously) most grotesque. The contrast between this sort of music and the noisy "super-ragtime" with which some Yanks billeted at the same place tried to shout them down, was very marked.

On the 24th of June, a very definite *alerte* was given:

1 Reference has already been made to the work of the F.W.V.R.C. in this area: we were frequently in touch with their workers at Auzéville, Jubécourt, and elsewhere. It is interesting to note that after the signing of the Armistice, the Grange Lecomte became the Headquarters of the F.W.V.R C.'s reconstruction work in the devastated villages of the surrounding district.

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all kit, stores, etc., were packed up in readiness for an immediate move: minute instructions were given out as to the organisation of the front-work in case of attack, and for that night at least we expected any minute to hear that the Germans were breaking through. However, after a day or two the notice of the *alerte* was cancelled, and no event of especial note occurred.

It was on the last day of the month that we left the 157th Division and the Rarécourt sector, as a result of a request from our O.C. to the D.S.A. that we might be attached to another division. Relations with the staff of the 157th Division had been somewhat strained both during the retirement and since: the divisional authorities did not see eye to eye with us on the subject of the uses for which Red Cross cars might properly be employed: and the frequent changing of the generals in command did not make things easier. We were therefore not sorry when we were relieved on the morning of June 30th by a French section; we left Rarécourt immediately after lunch for Souilly, a distance of some 20 kilometers. We turned left off the Bar-le-Duc road through Hippécourt, where S.S.A. 19 had recently been *au repos*, and finally encamped in a very jolly little wood by the roadside, between Souilly and St. André. We had the whole camp, which consisted of a few hutments and was known as the *Camp des Autos*, entirely to ourselves: most men slept out in the woods or in the cars, though there were ample sleeping billets available. We took our meals in the woods in al fresco style, squatting down on any available stump or bank round about the Souper. During the week we spent here, the weather was first-rate: the surrounding country was most delightful, wooded hills sloping down to open grassy fields full of oxe-eye daisies and a myriad other flowers. From the naturalist's point of view these woods and fields were a veritable happy hunting-ground: our bug-specialist was in his element. To see E.S.B. tripping the light

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fantastic toe down a woodland glade (with emphasis on the fantastic) after a "White Admiral," was a sight to make even the gods shout "Good old Bol!" and indeed, half the convoy was temporarily engrossed in stalking "Purple Emperors."

In the neighbouring village of Souilly, our drill shorts caused no small interest; there were a lot of Yanks in the place, Souilly being an important station on the Verdun railway; but not even an American had ever been known to do anything quite so extraordinary as to wear shorts!

On July 8th we left this very pleasant spot to join the 127th Division, then holding a quiet sector in the Argonne forest just to the left of the sector we had come from a week previously. The roads for this move were phenomenally dusty, and even during the second part of the journey, which from Fleury onwards lay right through the middle of the forest, the bus in front was half concealed from each driver in a cloud of fine white powdered dust. The H.Q. of the Division was at Les Islettes, a deserted village right in the centre of the Argonne forest, on the Clermont—St.-Menehould road. Hereabouts was a big stretch of open country, partly cultivated before the war, sloping gradually up to the encircling woods. The forest consists almost entirely of oaks, with a few birch and ash-trees interspersed.

The convoy was billeted in the little hamlet of La Noue, at the edge of the forest about a kilometer outside Les Islettes: sleeping billets were practically non-existent, but we had a cart-shed as a mess-room. The cars were parked in an open field. On the day after our arrival we were inspected by the Médecin-Divisionnaire, who made us a very friendly speech of welcome and shook hands with each man in turn. The front work in this sector was not at all interesting: owing to the expectation of an enemy offensive, the line in these parts was very strongly held, three divisions being compressed into a sector of line

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En route, Argonne Forest, July 8th, 1918.

Relieving 8th Italian Division, June 1918.

Camp des Autos, July, 1918.

Wrecked Tanks, Aug. 1918.

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which in ordinary circumstances would be held by only one. For this reason, all our posts were served from one central post, known as the Poste de la Croix de Pierre, situated right in the midst of the forest. It was reached by a military road along the edge of the forest: from this road here and there we had glimpses of the flat country away to the right, where lay the sector we had recently left, and beyond that Verdun. At the Croix de Pierre post three cars were on duty; from it they went up as required to the regimental posts. Of these there were three, known as Haute Chevrie (P.C. Lucrèce), Chardon, and Cardine. They lay one to the left, one straight on up the road, and one to the right, and were not far from the edge of the forest. Hereabouts the woodlands were cut with deep gullies, and two of the posts were right down in these hollows or ravines. It was at one or other of these posts that we first met the 25th and 29th Battalions of the Chasseurs à Pied: from the very first our relations with them were of the friendliest, and right up to the end we got on particularly well with them. The morale of these troops was very good, and their whole spirit was quite different from anything we had come across before in the French Army: in contrast with the 157th Division the difference was most striking.

From the posts the wounded were taken down to the Triage (Amb. 6/18) at Les Senades, a little village a few kilometers south of Les Islettes. Here one of our cars was stationed, to help an American section with the evacuations to Fleury, Briseaux, Froidos, etc. As each car came down it was replaced at once by another car which went straight up to Croix de Pierre.

Both from Rarécourt and from Les Islettes a number of the members of the convoy were able to pay visits to S.S.A. 13, who were still in their old billets at Maffrécourt: and several S.S.A. 13 men got over to see us. This was the first time that the two sister convoys had been in the

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same vicinity since June or July 1917, when we played "13" at football first at Vieil Dampierre and then at Vanault.

It was while we were in this sector that the long expected German "offensive" was started,—only to be turned into the victorious counter-offensive which Foch kept up from this time right to the end. On the night of July 14th,—the great national day of France,—a tremendous bombardment started away on our left. It appears that the French artillery anticipated the German barrage by about an hour, and this was probably instrumental in enabling Gouraud's IVth Army to make that magnificent stand which eventually ruined the German High Command's plan of attack. The offensive was launched on a gigantic scale, the whole French front right across Champagne from Château-Thierry to Massiges being attacked: but only at the western end of the battle-field was any progress made, and that of no great value. Our bit of the line was just to the right of the battle: on the 15th a very heavy gas bombardment was directed on our sector, resulting in many casualties, and the gas was hanging about in the forest for some days afterwards: but though the bombardment in Champagne continued with only slightly abated intensity up till the 18th or later, opposite us things very quickly became normal once more.

On July 16th the convoy was inspected by Lieut.-Colonel Sir Arthur Lawley, accompanied by Captain Dennis-Bailey and several others. On the same day Couturier, our capital little *Maréchal de logis* who had been with us since December 1916, left us to go to the R.V.F. section. We were very sorry to lose him, though glad he was not leaving the Division altogether.

About this time rumours of a long move became rife: the regiments of the 127th Division were supposed to be "troupes de poursuite," and hadn't been in any big attack

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since April, so that they were pretty sure to be required soon. It was on July 21st that we left La Noue, the cars leaving in small groups of four or five at ten-minute intervals. (This cunning ruse was apparently designed to prevent the aerial Boche from realising that the whole convoy, and therefore—by a simple syllogy—the Division, was on the move.)

But at first we only went a few kilometers away, to the little village of Passavant, the other side of the Argonne forest. Here we stayed several days, expecting each day to be the last. There were not many billets available, most men sleeping in the cars: furthermore, beyond the greasing and general tuning up necessary before a long run, our stay was of too uncertain duration to allow any big jobs to be tackled. A route-march to a lake on the edge of the Belval forest, followed by a bathe and tea, made a good afternoon's outing. Another day some relaxation was provided by a concert given by the 29th Chasseurs at the Foyer du Soldat,—a typical French show, given in a stifling atmosphere. The Chasseurs were a very fine lot of men, and we got to know them perhaps better than most of the regiments with whom we worked. On the 27th we took the road again, ostensibly for Vitry-le-François: we passed through Vanault-les-Dames, within a couple of miles of the little village where we spent such an enjoyable *repos* in June and July of the previous year. Arrived at Vitry, we were told we were to go straight on to Meaux: we left the town by the Sommesous road, a typical main road of this part of Champagne. The surrounding country is very flat: here and there American camps were springing up, but there was little of interest. The road was bad, and the journey was not improved by sudden and very fierce squalls, when the rain came down in sheets. We arrived for lunch at Ferè-Champenoise, parking the cars in the square (where, in 1914, the French surprised the German invading troops

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at a drunken revel, and easily captured the town). After lunch we pushed on again through similar country to Sézanne; here we left the plains behind us. Our course now lay by Coulommiers,—a pleasant little town whose acquaintance we had made some weeks before: and thence on to Meaux itself. From the top of the hills overlooking the Marne valley, we had a very fine view of the town, with the red roof and flying buttresses of the cathedral clearly visible. After a short halt by the wayside, we drove right down into the town, parking the cars under cover in the market square. For billets we were assigned an old mill by the river-side.

The next day we remained at Meaux; of this we were glad enough, for after the run from Passavant, a distance of [1]200 kilometers odd, there were a number of little jobs requiring attention. Most of us found time to have a look round the town during the afternoon: it is a very delightful place, particularly in contrast with the deserted villages of the Argonne. Perhaps the most picturesque part of the town is on the Marne, where the old wooden mills, built up on piles driven into the river bed, span the river from one side to the other. The cathedral is interesting, but has been largely restored: in its shadow stands the Episcopal palace, with its beautiful garden, and the old chapter-house, a stone building dating from the 13th century, with a picturesque old staircase and turrets at either end. There are also many pleasant walks along the Marne side: while the floating baths moored in mid-stream had attractions for many.

The next morning (July 29th) we once more started off: at Le Plessis-Belleville we encountered a bit of flat country and *pavé* road which recalled early days in Flanders. At Nanteuil-le-Haudouin we found ourselves in a region of Yanks: thence we went by Ormoy-Villers to Crépy-en-Valois, a little town which, owing to the big

[1] A record run for the whole convoy in one day.

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rail-head there, suffered very heavily from enemy air-raids. From Crépy on to Béthisy St. Pierre—the destination specified to us,—we were continually held up by the passage of hundreds of lorries, packed with troops: when we did finally arrive, we had to return on our tracks for some distance and then branch off to Villers-Cotterets.

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"A BINGE."

SCENE: The Car Rank of any Billet.
Time: 3-30 p.m.

A. (Pausing in his labours with a cleaning rag) "What about a brew?"

B. (under the car) "Yes, what about it? We've got tea and some margarine, and a bit of jam."

A. "Where did you get the jam, B?" (B. replies in an undertone.)

A. (continuing) "We've no milk,"

B. (after a pause) "Shall we ask C. and D. to bring their mugs to our bus in five minutes? I know C. has some milk, and D. got a parcel yesterday."

A. "Right-o. Go ahead. I'll stop here to tell the tale at Inspection. The O.C.'s just coming round." (Exit B. in search of the two "guests.")

A. enters the bus and begins to tidy up. A table is brought out from beneath the cushions. A pair of collapsible legs (extremely collapsible) are fixed on and made firm by holes in the floor. A Primus stove is lit and a billican of water put on. Half a loaf of bread appears, together with cigarette-tins containing various items of food. A. jumps out of the bus for a moment to report on the day's work, then returns to cut four thick slices of bread.

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"A BINGE."

A. (to himself) "Tea-strainer." Follows a search: under the cushions, beneath the blankets, in the front box, in the tool locker, in the spare kit locker, etc., until he finally returns triumphantly with a Gold Flake tin, pierced in the sides and base, which does duty for a strainer.

Enter B. followed by C. and D. bringing aforementioned milk, another Primus stove, and extras.

Amid a buzz of conversation, the quartette become seated, two a side, at the table. The second Primus is utilised for toast. In a little while, what is known in Convoy circles as a good "fug" has been created.

A. (to C. who has become heated in argument) "Mind the table, you!"

The table survives and the conversation proceeds, broken by shouts from B. at work with the stoves, "Mugs up, if you want any tea: milk in that tin, and go steady with it. Two pieces of toast ready. Get going, some of you." They get going.

(Only those who have experienced it can really appreciate the delight of eating thickly cut French ration bread, toasted, and overlaid with margarine

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and Convoy jam. And this delight gives place to that of drinking tea, made in a rarely washed billican, flavoured strongly with petrol, and sweetened with condensed milk. There is no more delicious beverage in the world!)

Half an hour has passed. Cigarettes and pipes are introduced and the atmosphere becomes even worse. Conversation flows freely on many topics. A "binge" after inspection is *the* social event of the day. It is the medium for discussing Convoy events, for criticising the management, for holding Committees, for debating a hundred and one different subjects, and for indulging in much harmless abuse. It is an outlet, a relief of feeling, a temporary cure for "fed-upness."

But it is something more. Through it all, though perhaps unconsciously, runs a strong sense of fellowship.

. . . "This I know,
From quiet home and small beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning
Save laughter and the love of friends."[1]

—G.N.H.

[1] Belloc.

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Chapter VIII.

THERE was no room for doubt now that the division was bound for an active part of the front. The traffic on the roads was phenomenal, British, French and American troops all being on the move. Rumours came through of heavy fighting in front of the Villers-Cotterets forest: Mangin's straightening up of the Marne salient had begun. Villers-Cotterets, for which the Germans fought so desperately in the latter part of June, was destitute of civilian inhabitants: the place had been exposed both to long-range guns and to bombardment from the air. The central *place* was full of German guns of all calibres, recently captured by the 48th French division.

We didn't stay in the town, but drew out into the forest a few kilometers away. Everywhere were great numbers of tanks, mostly the small "whippet" type, though larger ones were also met with. A tank in the fairway is something of an anomaly, and with its uncouth swaying and lurching is apt to be a little difficult for a mere automobile to negotiate. We spent the night in the woods just outside the village of Vivières: a few cars were sent up to be attached to the G.B.D. in the region of Coeuvres. Here the results of the recent fighting were only too obvious: villages which two months previously had been miles from the front, now lay in ruins smashed

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and battered beyond all recognition. That such havoc should have been wrought in so short a time testified to an artillery activity of unprecedented intensity on both sides. Everywhere we came across disabled tanks, which had been knocked out in the attack launched two or three days previously.

The following morning (July 30th) we moved to another part of the forest, near Dampleux, where we were not many hundred yards from the trenches which had marked the furthest point of the German advance in June. We were speedily reminded of this fact by a powerful and malodorous scent which kept assailing our nostrils when the wind was in a certain quarter. A short search revealed a dead horse in an advanced state of decomposition, in close proximity to our soup-kitchen. For the first day we bore with this unpleasantly "talkative" neighbour: on the second, we lent a willing hand to the G.B.D. men in giving the poor brute a decent cremation. Then was a mighty sound of sizzling heard throughout the woodlands, and a great smoke arose from his funeral pyre . . . May Poseidon rest his ashes!

The Villers-Cotterets forest, particularly in those parts which have not been touched with shell-fire, is very beautiful; the trees are all beeches, through whose tall slender trunks the diffused light of the morning sun flooded down as from the lantern in some lofty cathedral roof. The light effects in these woods, both in the early morning and again towards evening, were sometimes indescribably beautiful: indeed, none of the forests through which we have passed in the course of our wanderings was quite so pleasing to the eye.

It was at about 9 p.m. on the evening of the 31st, that orders came through to the effect that we were to go up that night, as the division was attacking at dawn. Followed two hours of great activity, in the course of which all kit, stores, etc., had to be dumped at the edge

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of the forest, where they were left in the charge of some of the French staff. We lined up along the road, to load up with *brancardiers:* and shortly after midnight we started off in convoy: no lights were allowed: the roads were very dusty, which made it difficult to follow the bus in front: and where our route lay through the forest, it was as black as pitch. From Dampleux we went on to Vouty: it was weird to see the villages, mostly in ruins, looming up one after another out of the darkness. Once or twice the Lieutenant missed the way, taking us right down to the Ourcq and back again: and it was almost dawn when we reached our stopping place, some hundreds of yards south of Billy-sur-Ourcq. Here the cars lined up by the side of the road. Meanwhile, towards 4-15 a.m. the British and French artillery fire became exceedingly intense: on every side the batteries were blazing away, and the noise was deafening. From a wood somewhat ahead of us on the right came the curious throbbing noise of a squadron of tanks going up. At sun-rise on the morning of August 1st the convoy split up, the drivers taking advantage of such natural camouflage as was available for the cars. As night gradually fled before the daylight, instead of the flashes which had up till then marked the bursting of the shells, puffs of smoke appeared and mingled with the rising ground mists, forming a grey cloud-wrack over the countryside. The church and houses of Billy-sur-Ourcq were silhouetted against the rose-red sunrise. The moment when the infantry went over was marked by the sudden cessation of fire. Shrapnel began to burst over the village,—the result of the Germans' answering fire: soon the first British ambulances came down loaded—the 34th British Division was leading the attack, and they had a dressing-station at Billy. At 9-30 our cars went forward, one at a time, to Billy, where we loaded up with *brancardiers.* Prisoners were already coming through. We went straight on to

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Oulchy-la-Ville, across high open country full of recently abandoned battery positions, exploded munition dumps, etc. The road was in a very bad state owing to the shell-holes: the whole countryside was a scene of extreme desolation. At Oulchy we deposited the *brancardiers* in a cornfield where the Poste de Secours was: the cars waited in the village itself. This place will always remain in the memory of most of those who were there as a place of corpses and of smells intolerable, a veritable land of horror. The streets were strewn with dead horses: furthermore, the Boche in retiring had had to leave his dead. The ruined houses were full of ammunition-cases, rifles, and German equipment of all sorts: while here and there one came across sights too ghastly to write about.

The British (34th Division) had a dressing-station close by, and at first we helped to evacuate some of their cases. German prisoners were acting as stretcher-bearers, bringing in a ceaseless stream of wounded. We evacuated the British cases only as far as Billy, our own divisional wounded having to be taken right back to the *Ambulance* at Vouty. Here the surgeons and dressers were doing their best to cope with the casualties that were continually coming in: a line of cars was always waiting to be unloaded. At Vouty our "heavy brigade," consisting of the Federal, the Austin and the Vulcan, had their base.

During the afternoon we started two more advanced posts, one in the village of Grand Rozoy, and the other at a point where a light railway crossed the Soissons—Château-Thierry road. A relay-post was functioning lower down on this road, under the charge of H.E.M. Here our cooks had a wayside fire going, and drivers were able to have a hurried meal before going up. The road to Grand-Rozoy, hardly more than a *piste* or cart-track, led up through fields absolutely seething with batteries: it was far from pleasant when these guns were

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putting over a barrage,—the noise was deafening and the concussion tremendous. At Grand-Rozoy the aid-post was in one of the few houses still unsmashed: the place was continually exposed to heavy shelling, and it was not a spot where one cared to linger. A. Pearson was in charge here, and (as likewise did many of the drivers) had a very warm time. Especially at night was the journey up a trying one: the road was narrow, and the artillery-columns raised clouds of dust through which there was nothing for it but to drive blindly on in faith.

After several hours' continual running, the strain of the long evacuations to the rear became very considerable. The roads over this newly-captured territory were in places very bad indeed, almost impassable, and were nowhere good: some of the bad stretcher-cases suffered agonies during the long transit, yet one could do nothing to alleviate their pain.

On the afternoon of the second day (August 2nd) a slight lull in the fighting enabled us to send cars down to Dampleux to bring up the stores, etc., which had been dumped: and the convoy-base was forthwith installed at Oulchy-le-Château. This place, through which some of us had passed two months previously in the retreat, was changed beyond recognition: but there were still houses that were not too badly smashed, and in the absence of any *Major de Cantonnement* we were able to choose for our billets any house or houses we might fancy. After some vigorous tidying-up, we got a big front room in one of the houses into quite decent order, and set chairs round a great table, so that we really felt ourselves to be on the borders of civilisation once more. It was very interesting wandering round the village and investigating the Germans' billets, which had been hurriedly evacuated by their occupants; or attempting to translate the German notices with which the place was plastered. A large amount of material had been left behind. In a medical

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store it was interesting to find a lot of paper bandages and a paper substitute for cotton-wool. The Red Cross flag was flying from the church tower,—we subsequently found that in many of these villages the Germans had used the churches as hospitals.

That night two cars were sent forward to Droizy: and next morning (August 3rd) the enemy having retired yet further, the whole convoy moved forward several kilometers to the village of Maast-et-Violaine. The Soissons main-road, which had been the front line at the beginning of the attack, was in a fearful state. At one corner we passed a lot of disabled French tanks: they had been caught under a terrific fire, many of the drivers being killed or burned alive. The dead lay unburied all along the road.

At Maast we gathered round those of the civilians who had remained throughout the Boche occupation, and heard their tale. The last Germans had left the place about 10 a.m. the previous morning: for some days previous to their departure the wounded had passed through an aid-post in the village at the rate of about 1000 a day: the ambulance cars (running on rubberless spring-tyres) had been on the road day and night without stopping. The Germans had not behaved badly: indeed, these folk seemed almost sorry for the men, who were ill-fed and badly treated by their officers. Before leaving they had removed the bells from the church belfry, and had stripped all the lead gutters and piping from the roofs: these they had not had time to remove, and the stuff lay piled in heaps by the road-side.

Our office was set up in a sort of loft, and the kitchen in a house where the ashes of the fire the Germans had left were still alive and smouldering. It would not have been a bad billet (though there was very little sleeping accommodation) but for the flies, which were absolutely pestiferous: they were indeed very bad everywhere on

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this newly captured ground, owing to the number of corpses that remained unburied for days. We put down to the agency of flies the constant attacks of dysentery and similar disorders from which many men on the convoy, as indeed throughout the division, were suffering during this advance.

For the few days that we were at Maast-et-Violaine, the running was very heavy indeed. The Germans had retired across the Vesle, and were now putting up a strong resistance along the line of the river. The 34th British division went down on the 4th, leaving the 127th to bear the full brunt of the attack: and the casualties were in consequence very great. All evacuations had now to be made right back to Villers-Cotterets, where the rail-head was. This was a distance of some 45 kilometers, over roads that were in an indescribably shocking state: the shell-holes were so bad as to be in places hardly negotiable at all: and the continual stream of ammunition-lorries combined with some heavy rainfalls to reduce the road-surface to a morass. It was perhaps these long evacuation runs by night and day, even more than the front work, that taxed the convoy resources to the uttermost: the journey to Villers-Cotterets and back could rarely be done under six hours: often when there were bad stretcher cases to be carried, it took ten or even twelve: and it was no uncommon thing to be held up in a traffic-block for a couple of hours. Half a dozen Ford ambulances (from S.S.U 646) were attached to us for a short time, to help in the evacuatory work; but further complications arose from a temporary shortage of petrol, which had to be fetched from a depôt the best part of 100 kilometers distant.

At first we collected the wounded wherever we could pick them up,—chiefly at two aid-posts by the side of the Braisne road, one just beyond Cerseuil, and the other at a little wayside hut by the cross-roads near the village of

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Lesges. It was down this road that we retired during those memorable last days of May; now the countryside presented a very different aspect. Everywhere German ammunition lay scattered about: their shells were always packed in wicker-work baskets or cages, and these were strewn about the roads in large quantities. Along the roadside and in the fields single man-holes had been scraped or dug, when positions had had to be held perhaps for a few hours only, and then abandoned. Indeed, these little "funk-holes" were a characteristic of all this country where trench-warfare had given place to what was more or less open fighting. Frequently we passed the reserve line of infantry, who would be vigorously digging themselves in, in the lee of a bank or any convenient fold in the ground.

At this time the 29th Chasseurs had their regimental post in the village of Cerseuil, the 25th being a little to the left. On August 5th the front-work was organised as follows: a Relay-Post was started at the Lesges cross-roads, and from here were replaced the cars coming down from the two isolated farms where the Aid-Posts were. These farms, the Ferme d' Epritel and the Ferme de la Siège respectively, were situated on the hill just above the Vesle valley: they were reached by execrable roads,—mere mud-tracks across the fields. From the Ferme d' Epritel our cars frequently went down to Couvrelles, a little village down in the valley close to Braisne. Many members of the convoy have good reason to remember that little ravine,—the road strewn with branches of trees and even whole trunks where a tree had been shot off; the muddy surface pitted with huge shell-holes; the little village lying in places half across the street. There was always the acrid smell of recently exploded H.E., and at times the shelling was so fierce as to make the place a veritable death-trap.

Indeed, the whole of this area was subjected from time

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to time to a searching fire, both H.E. and shrapnel being freely used. The roads on which we were working led over an open plateau which was seething with batteries: and when the Boche was not actually shelling the roads, which were under the full observation of their captive-balloons, they were "feeling" for the batteries. This was a very different business from the old stationary methods of warfare, when they knew the exact position of the batteries, and confined their range within a radius of 150 yards or so. No given spot could now be regarded as immune. The Relay-Post came in for some vigorous shelling at times: there was no cover, and all we could do was to move it back temporarily a few hundred yards down the road.

During these days our cars frequently passed through villages which had lain on our course during the May retreat. Arcis St. Restitué, where some of our cars were stationed when the place first came within the range of the German heavy guns on May 28th, had been a good deal knocked about since that time. Cramaille, where we halted for a hurried snack of breakfast that same eventful morning, had collapsed like a pack of cards all over the road, which was barely passable: the whole place stank of corpses. Beugneux was a scene of complete and absolute desolation: it had come in for an intense bombardment on the occasion of the French attack on the Butte de Chalmont. The picturesque little village of Cerseuil, from its situation on a hill crest above the Vesle valley, was likewise heavily shelled, though not destroyed: where a few weeks before we had revelled in the flowers on the walls, and the redstarts' nests in the church choir, we now met crowds of straggling refugees on their way back from Braisne, where the fighting was too fierce for them to remain.

The whole country-side for miles around had yet to be cleared up, and one's eyes fell on every conceivable kind of débris: abandoned munition dumps, guns, transport

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waggons: great piles of kit and equipment of all sorts, English, French, German: wrecked 'planes, derelict tanks, smashed lorries. Towards the end of the attack the roads were getting a bit better: the worst shell-holes had been roughly filled in, and the most noisome of the corpses covered with a handful of earth. But for all of us, those days will always be days of evil memory.

On August 9th, when things were beginning to calm down somewhat, the convoy moved from Maast to the neighbouring village of Violaine: here most of the cars were parked in a field at the bottom of a steep hill, the mess-room and kitchen being in the village on the hill-crest. Two days later, five of our men[1] were decorated with the Croix de Guerre, by General Pigault, the general commanding the 127th Division. The bugle band of the 25th Chasseurs was present and played their regimental *refrain*, followed by the Marseillaise: the citations were then read out individually, and the medals presented by the general: followed again the Marseillaise, and finally "God save the King." This was played very slowly, and by contrast with the French national war-song sounded as if it might have been part of the Dead March from Saul. Proceedings were brought to a close by a march-past, led by the band.

On our last day at Maast, the place had been subjected, for the first time, to a sharp bombardment which took us completely by surprise: and the same thing happened during our last night at Violaine. We left the latter place at 11 p.m. on the night of August 11th, and had a somewhat trying night-run down to Dampleux: the village of Muret was being shelled as we went through,—just at a time when we were being held up by a horse-convoy. During the two days spent at Dampleux, in a farm-yard, a few minor repairs were done: after the recent heavy running, both cars and drivers were in urgent

[1] A. Pearson, R. P. Yates, A. F. Ardley, J. W. Brown, E. Cooper.

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need of a thorough rest, but this, it appeared, was not to be vouchsafed to us. On the 14th we moved to a place in the woods just outside Vivières: the G.B.D. were in the neighbouring Ferme d' Essarts. This billet—though actual billets there were none—was really rather jolly, and if only we could have definitely settled down, instead of hourly expecting to move the next night or the next morning, it would in many ways have been an ideal camping-ground. We were at the edge of a copse of ashes and poplars, reached from the road by a track across fields full of St. John'swort and marjoram and bugloss and a hundred other flowers. The office was in a sort of grotto formed in the hill-side by overhanging creepers. The workshop and Federal were in the open, just outside the copse. The rest of the cars were in the wood, between two clear-flowing streams, whose cold, fresh water was a great boon: the cooking was done on open fires, round which we took our meals. The flies were less troublesome here than they had recently been, though the wasps did their utmost to supply any deficiency.

During these few days, there was not a great deal of running to be done. There were a few *ramassage* runs, evacuations being made to St. Rémi station hospital just outside Villers-Cotterets. Once or twice cars were sent as far back as the charming town of Senlis, with its old city walls and Roman amphitheatre,—a temporary re-admission into the life of civilised men, which after the recent attacks was a delightful experience. On the 17th, six cars were sent up to Hautefontaine to help with the evacuations of the division which was attacking that morning: apparently, in spite of the heavy bombardment up the line, the casualties were not as heavy as was expected, for the help of these cars was not actually required. It was on the same date that an important event in the convoy's life occurred in the departure of A. Pearson, who for seven months, during which the

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convoy had seen some very difficult times, had been in command of the section. The loss to the convoy was incalculable: it is difficult to express how much we owe to his leadership. His extraordinary ability in handling difficult situations and (a harder task) difficult persons, together with his absolute fairness, won the confidence of everyone: and as much personally as from the point of view of the convoy as a whole, his departure was universally regretted.

The reins were taken up by H. E. Milton, who had the difficult job of leading us almost immediately through another attack, though no repairs of any importance had as yet been tackled, and the men were hardly rested. At 2 a.m. on the morning of the 20th, the long expected move up from Vivières was carried out: many of the men were feeling by no means fit. Fortunately, the night wasn't very dark, and the journey was completed without difficulty. We followed the Hautefontaine road for some kilometers, and then turned right to the little village of Jaulzy. It was a weird sensation, to drive up gradually into the region of the guns, whose flashes lit up the night all round, and yet, owing to the noise of our engines, to hear nothing of what was going on. Arrived at our destination, we parked the cars in some big caves: the place was a disused quarry, with long passages or galleries down which the cars had to be backed: soon the caves were lit up with the long-thrown beams of our headlights; and above the reverberations from half a dozen Buick engines echoed the shouts of the convoyeurs as they guided their drivers into position.

Next morning we came out of the caves to survey a very striking scene. We were on a hill-side overlooking the valley of the river Aisne, which flowed immediately below us: at one point the roofs of Attichy clustered in the valley-bottom: further away, up a little ravine, the church spire of Bitry could be seen. In the rising mists,

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both in the valley and still more on the slopes beyond, innumerable batteries were in action: the French were putting over a terrific barrage, lasting incessantly for several hours: the noise was thunderous, for heavy artillery was being used, as well as field guns. Flash followed flash, the noise of the explosion being heard almost immediately afterwards: ahead in the misty morning, we saw where the shells were bursting. Overhead, 'planes kept appearing and disappearing amongst the clouds: the captive balloons likewise would be one minute clearly visible, and the next wrapped in mist.

Jaulzy, the spot from which we surveyed this scene, was a typical Aisne village, with its "corbie" gables and grey stone houses: curiously enough, it had suffered very little from its proximity to the lines. We were not to stay there long. At noon the convoy moved forward: six cars, with the "Heavy Brigade," were sent to La Vache Noire, by the Aisne-side, where they were soon helping with the evacuation work of the 128th Division, then attacking: the remainder crossed the Aisne by a pontoon-bridge, and took up a position by the wayside on the Bitry—Berny-Rivières road. After an hour or two here, we received orders to move further up, and got as far as the Ferme Confrécourt, where we found the road blocked by a fallen building: we therefore had to return, by way of Ors and Roche, to Vaux, which was our destination for the night. The division took over their part of the line that evening, and an aid-post was established at Nouvron-Vingré. Next morning the division attacked, and we were able to place our cars still further up, at Tartiers. The same morning the convoy again moved, this time further back, to the outskirts of Vic-sur-Aisne: here we occupied the grounds of a château close to the river, sharing them with a battery of six-inch guns, whose company we were not sorry to lose a few days later. (We found it pleasant neither for practitioner nor patient to

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have dental operations punctuated by the roaring of a a 155 mm. gun a score of yards away.[1])

The running was very regular, though not excessive, the "push" being carried out by a series of small attacks which took place practically every night and morning. As in the previous attack, *couchés* were usually evacuated to the Asile des Vieillards (formerly a château of François 1er) at Villers-Cotterets, and *assis* to the St. Rémi hospital just outside the town. (From the continued long evacuations that had to be made there, over bad roads, as well as from the unkempt state of the place itself, this town came to be regarded as a place accursed, and as such it will always remain in the memories of some of us.) Very urgent cases were sometimes taken first to the Ambulance 8/6, which was established in a big farm-yard on the hill above Hautefontaine: gas-cases were sent to Ambulance 2/65 at Roye St. Nicolas.

We had the mixed blessing of a moon during this attack. The driver when on the road was glad enough of her light, for the roads were bad and the traffic heavy: but when trying to snatch an hour or two's sleep down at Vic, he cursed her in no measured terms: for night after night she lit up the way for "Jerry's" aerial peregrinations, and showed him the Aisne bridges, which he bombed with Teutonic persistency: and the bridges were unpleasantly near our billet. . . .

On the 23rd the aid-post was advanced to Bieuxy, which had only recently been left by the enemy. This entailed rather a long run from the convoy base: accordingly a Relay-Post was established at the Ferme Confrécourt. It was on the hill going up to Bieuxy that a lorry loaded with munitions caught fire a day or two before we went down. After waiting a few minutes to let the fire die down, two of our men had just passed the

[1] B. N Neave, Ernest Jones and T. W. Hopkins visited the convoy from the 21st to the 28th under conditions perhaps not altogether favourable for their purposes.

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lorry, with a load of wounded on board, when the lorry (or its contents) blew up with a terrific report, killing thirty men and wounding as many more. Some of these casualties were men who had been half a mile or more away from the lorry.

On Wednesday the 28th the convoy left at mid-day for L' Isle Adam. Our route took us through Compiègne, which like so many other towns behind the battle-area had been very heavily bombed and shelled in the German spring offensives: there was hardly a house that had not been hit one way or another, though the town was hardly touched when we knew it a year and a half before. From Compiègne we went on to Senlis and Chantilly to L' Isle Adam, where we spent the night. Next morning we were sorry to learn that we were not to remain at this pleasant little town: we moved to Gascourt, a little hamlet just outside Luzarches. There were no billets here, and though we had started work on the cars, we decided a few days later to take advantage of better billets and accomodation at the neighbouring Château d' Hérivaux, whither we moved on September 5th.

This château, the residence of a wealthy Parisian jeweller, stands by itself, in the midst of the Chantilly forest, on the site of an old abbey, the ruins of which still remain. Our office was in one of the rooms of the "home farm," and the mess-room was an open cart-shed: the majority of the cars were drawn up alongside a pathway through the woods, beyond the old abbey garden: most men slept in their cars: and each evening big wood-fires were lit, round which fellows would sit and spin yarns in the fire-light. The surrounding country is very pretty: the forest-land, where owls and nightjars hold sway, and the stags come out at night to browse in the fields of beetroot, is split up by tracts of marshy land, where at the time we were there the ground was starred with the heliotrope flowers of the Autumn crocus. The

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trees are chiefly oak, ash and birch: the acacia is also noticeable.

During this *repos* the running was done chiefly by a car attached to the G.B.D. at Lassy: every afternoon there was a *ramassage* run, in which the *infirmeries* in the various villages over which the division was scattered were visited. These lay, roughly speaking, in a triangular stretch of ground between Survilliers, Asnières-sur-Oise, and Luzarches. Some of the villages were not more than fifteen miles or so from Paris, and on a clear day a fine view could be had of the metropolis: the Eiffel Tower was easily visible, and the Sacré-Coeur church on the heights of Montmartre. All cases were evacuated to Chantilly, the famous racing town situated right in the middle of the forest: the town itself is not interesting, but the château and race-course are very fine. The course consists of a big expanse of level turf, bordered on one side by the town and on the other by the forest: at the lower end, facing right up the course, is the magnificent château, surrounded by a piece of ornamental water—a sort of glorified moat: fine carriage drives, decorated with statuary, lead up over the draw-bridges. The stables are in themselves so handsome a set of buildings as to lead one at first sight to take them for part of the château.

When we first went to Hérivaux. the weather was still warm enough to make a bathe in the River Oise very welcome. The nearest point on the river was at Asnières, not far from the picturesque old Abbaye de Royaumont, where a Scottish Women's Hospital was established. At Boran, another little Oise-side village, boats could be hired, and when the weather became a little too cold for bathing, boating or fishing expeditions could be made. After the strain and stress of two attacks, men and cars alike needed a rest: but unfortunately, this *repos* was brought to an end sooner than was expected, and we were unable to get through as much mechanical work as we

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had hoped. The departure of R.P.Y., who for the past year had been in charge of the workshop, unfortunately coincided with the absence of W.H.B. on sick leave: so that very heavy work devolved on the other two mechanics (B.J. and L.E.B.).

On September 17th the convoy left the peaceful precincts of Hérivaux for Soissons. Our route lay by Chantilly and Senlis: a wayside halt was made for lunch between Senlis and Crépy-en-Valois. Thence we proceeded to Villers-Cotterets, an unloved spot, and then along a *pavé* road, which was in a shocking state, rendering progress very slow. At one point we had to call a halt, in order to let pass a column of some 3000 recently captured German prisoners. The road led at first through the forest: a few kilometers further we found ourselves once again in the land of desolation,—a land of shell-holes, of battered and splintered trees, of abandoned shell-dumps and wrecked earth-works. Villages there were none: according to the maps, we passed through one or two,—but we saw only here and there a smashed house by the roadside. Presently we came in view of the valley of the Aisne: it is fairly wide hereabouts and well-wooded: houses peeped from the trees, while from the outskirts of Soissons rose the double-spired ruins of the church of St. Jean-des-Vignes. On the far side of the valley, the long line of sausages, with occasional puffs of shrapnel in the air, betokened the front: while here and there little clouds of smoke cleared slowly away from the distant plateau. The whole formed rather a striking scene.

We descended the long hill down into the town, pulling up just outside: here we had a scratch supper, and about 9 p.m. drew into one of the *faubourgs*, where we spent the night by the roadside. The next morning we were given practically a whole streetful of houses from which to choose billets: many of them were of course too

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badly smashed to be habitable, but most had a few rooms that were more or less intact.

We did not take over the aid-post work until the 19th, so that we had a few hours in which to look round the town. The destruction had been terrible: the whole of the central part of the town had been completely gutted, largely by fire: and the road led through piles of débris, cleared to one side so as to leave a free passage. Many of the streets, particularly the corners of by-streets, were entirely blocked by solid barricades of stones and bricks,—a sure sign of the heavy street-fighting that went on when the Germans captured the place the previous June. The cathedral was absolutely ruined: of the tower at the West end, only two fingers of masonry remained pointing precariously to the heavens. Inside, the whole of the roof of the nave and aisles had fallen in, and a great pile of débris filled the central space: only a few of the arches remained intact. Another big church, the Abbaye de St. Léger, was likewise fairly badly smashed, but the apse, which is rather fine, fortunately had not suffered as much as the rest of the place. Mention has already been made of the church of St. Jean des Vignes: this was in ruins long before the war, which merely added a few fresh scars to the traces which time and tempest had already left on the weathered masonry.

On September 19th our cars took over the aid-posts from the *Section Sanitaire* of the outgoing division. There were at first four posts, and a Relay-Post where three cars were stationed. Crossing the Aisne by the Pont des Anglais, our cars started to climb onto the high plateau land across which the front-lines then ran. The whole country-side was a pitiable scene of wreckage,—every village for miles around desolate and in ruins. The Relay-Post was at Crouy, on the up-slope of the hill: here the G.B.D. were installed, and here all down-going cars had to stop at the Triage. Of the aid-posts, two

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Pont des Anglais, Soissons.

Cathedral, Soissons, Autumn 1918.

Laon, October 1918.

Billet and Poste de Triage,
Faubourg de Vaux, Laon.

J. T. L's Bus, Montparnasse,
October 1918.

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were on the open plateau ground: one at Pont Rouge, a very unhealthy cross-roads by a ruined *sucrerie*, and one a little further on at some quarries known as Carrières R.1. The other two were in a sort of valley or ravine,—one, the Poste Vauveny, in a small chalk quarry by a battery of 155's, the other, an advanced post, in a very unhealthy village called Nanteuil-la-Fosse.

This post was undoubtedly one of the hottest spots the section ever knew: and many men will long remember that narrow sunken road leading down from the main Maubeuge high-road. Innumerable are the yarns that could be told of journeys to and from Nanteuil: of driving blindly through clouds of smoke, past runaway artillery-horses and limbers: of lorries knocked out and left by the roadside, or *cuisines roulantes* lying smashed in the ditches. Down in the hollow, the road led past a very unpleasant bend, where both the road itself and the surrounding marsh were pitted with almost contiguous shell-holes. The entrance to the village, and indeed all parts of it, were frequently shelled with a savage intensity, barrages being put over which covered the whole village with smoke. The writer well remembers meeting a couple of Frenchmen driving hell for leather out of the village on one such occasion: as the *fourgon* dashed by, one of the men shouted excitedly "attention aux bords du pays!" at the same time designating with a wild sweep of his arm the smoke-enwrapped ruins behind him. The spot was almost always under observation from the German "sausages," as we often discovered to our cost: furthermore, there was no proper dug-out in which to shelter,—only a small wayside hut and an old cellar,—neither of them an ideal spot to spend the night during a long bombardment. With such associations connected with the place, it seemed humorous to read, amongst the ruins at the village cross-roads where once a café had stood, a notice posted by the German authorities when they had

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occupied the village some months previously, to the effect that for columns of motor-lorries or other transport to halt in this village was "STRENG VERBOTEN!"

A fifth aid-post lay considerably to the right of the four above-mentioned posts, at Quincy: it was situated amongst a number of field batteries. There was very little work from this post: any patients there might be were taken to the Abattoir at Soissons for *triage* purposes, instead of to Crouy.

From the Triage, most cases were sent on to the Centre Hospitalier at Pontarcher, about ten kilometers from Soissons along the Compiègne road. At this place all the hospital orderly work was done by German prisoners, who were remarkably efficient at their job. *Malades* and *petits blessés* were taken on to Noyant, on the Château-Thierry road, and *gazés* to Septmonts.

Right from the beginning we experienced very heavy shelling in this sector: it was on September 20th that the R1 post was subjected to an intense bombardment, lasting at the rate of a shell every two minutes or so for a couple of hours. (A Ford car was badly hit, and L.A.G.'s car had all one side and the back blown in by the concussion, besides being hit in one or two places.) Mention has already been made of Nanteuil-la-Fosse. And not only were the the aid-posts shelled: whenever there was a moon on, "Jerry" came over and bombed Soissons, trying (as at Vic) for the Aisne bridges: and the town was frequently shelled, chiefly at night time, with long-range guns, the region where the convoy headquarters were being treated to several doses in this way. The presence of a big American rail-gun (known to us as "Dirty Dick") just outside the town, was not conducive to a quiet life. On the whole, those members of the convoy who chose billets in the cellars, if they had less light and comfort by day than those upstairs, were amply repaid by the greater measure of undisturbed slumber

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vouchsafed to them at night. Billets, as has already been mentioned, were scattered over a whole street: a day or two after our arrival at Soissons, we fitted out the two ground-floor rooms of the best house which the Rue Charles Périn could boast, as mess-room and "joy-room": furniture was brought in from the surrounding houses, and soon we were the proud "possessors" of no less than two pianos and a harmonium, as well as a sofa and a number of chairs and tables.

Meanwhile, relay-post and aid-posts were changing every few days. The relay was moved up to La Perrière, where we slept in a big cave with the G.B.D. men: at night it was weird to climb down into a trench and thence by a fissure in the rocks to enter this cave full of slumbering humanity. The place was lit by a carbide lamp: from the bunks ranged round the walls came the sound of steady snoring: while along them hung gas-masks, haversacks, water-bottles, "enfin tout le fourbi, quoi," of a French soldier. The Nanteuil post was moved forward to some dug-outs known as Les Golets, under the lee of the hill beyond the village: this was distinctly a change for the better, as though the village still had to be traversed, the post itself was comparatively sheltered. After coming up "all out" through the ruins of the village, where not a soul was to be seen, save perhaps some face peering out from a dug-out or cellar-entrance as you passed, it was a relief to draw up at Les Golets, and after turning the bus round to go in and chat with the chasseurs. Here in the evening you might witness the *visite* of the doctor, for this was a battalion-post of the 25th B.C.P.[1], and here men came in from the surrounding trenches for sick-parade. Later, after dusk, the *cuisines roulantes* would come up, and the ration-fatigues arrive from the front line for "la soupe." If it was a moonlight night, there would be a fine view

[1] Bataillon de Chasseurs à Pied.

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over Nanteuil down in the hollow, the ruins standing out in cold whiteness: perhaps the German planes would be passing overhead, and presently you might see the flashes of the bombs down at Soissons: or perhaps a few rounds of shrapnel would burst over the village—none too far away.

On the 27th the Germans retired along this front: for a day or two they had been shelling vigorously, using up all their remaining ammunition, so that to go up to Nanteuil and not to hear a single in-coming shell was almost uncanny by contrast with the previous few days. Meanwhile, everything was moving forward: all the batteries advanced, the guns being hitched onto lorries: innumerable touring-cars were going up and down, containing artillery-officers on the look-out for fresh positions. The next day, Nanteuil was completely transformed. Where two days ago hardly a soul was visible, columns of transport waggons, loaded with material, might now be seen parked in the fields, or waiting by the roadside: while from all sides rose the cheerful smoke of half a dozen or more field kitchens.

Meanwhile, the post at Les Golets was abandoned, though a car was still stationed with the 355th regiment down in Nanteuil. A new post was established at a god-forsaken spot known as L' Ange Gardien, several kilometers beyond Pont Rouge, on the Maubeuge road. The road led up past a very unhealthy corner known as the Moulin de Laffaux, where for hundreds of yards shell-holes of every conceivable shape and size had ploughed the earth up again and again, producing a scene of unimaginable desolation. The Ange Gardien itself was hardly better: except for the ruins of a sugar factory,—and they were merely a heap of rusty scrap-iron—no sign of any farm or inn could be discerned: nothing but shell-holes and collapsed dug-outs, and dead horses thinly buried beneath a few spadesful of soil. There was a

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small dug-out by the roadside, where one sheltered, when the cross-roads were shelled (as frequently happened), and slept at night. From a point a few hundred yards away, a good view could be obtained on a clear day of Laon cathedral, finely situated on a hill-top, which at that time was not very far behind the German lines.

At nightfall our cars went forward to the 172nd regimental aid-post, which was first in a sap in an abandoned German trench, being afterwards moved forward to the Grottes de Montparnasse. The road to these caves led past the end of the famous Chemin des Dames: the name of this historic road, once more made famous by the Great War, recalls all the glitter and pageantry of the middle ages, when it saw the grand processions of knights and ladies, mounted on gaily caparisoned steeds, on their way to the coronation ceremony at Reims cathedral: yet nothing could be less in harmony with this dreary waste of shell-holes and old trenches and barbed wire, over which three or four times had passed the scorching breath of battle.

As soon as the Grottes de Montparnasse had been cleared of the *hyperite* gas (the Germans had scattered it broadcast in little glass tubes, which the French trod under foot and crushed) a regular day-post was established there. These caves stretch for some distance, and would have easily accommodated a couple of thousand men: they were occupied by all the divisional *Génie*, sappers and pioneers, as well as by the regimental staff of the 172nd. The aid-post was in the remotest corner,—an evil-smelling spot: here we lived with the *brancardiers*, and messed with them, heating up our food above the somewhat feeble flame produced from tins full of solidified methylated-spirits.

These caves provided excellent cover, but the journey to and from the post was particularly unpleasant. The road was for some kilometers under the observation of

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German "sausages," and our cars were continually shelled. It was here that J.T.L.'s bus was knocked out by a direct hit on October 2nd: and when the wrecked car was being towed down next morning, both cars were followed down for some distance with H.E. fire. The same driver could write an interesting account of the attractions of the Moulin de Laffoux, under some such title as "Nocturnal reflections from the bottom of a shell-hole."

Meanwhile, the original post at Quincy was moved to a little village called Jouy. To reach this post, our cars followed the course of the Aisne through Bucy-le-long, Missy, Condé (where S.S.A. 2 had their base) and Vailly, and thence climbed to the plateau. The aid-post was in a dug-out at the foot of a hill, by a bend of the road, overlooking the ruined villages of Jouy and Aizy. S.S.A. 2 had two cars stationed at the same spot. A battery of heavies in the village below drew upon the place frequent bouts of very vigorous shelling; one was not surprised at the fragmentary state of the houses. Gas was frequently used, often simultaneously with the H.E. From the hill-top you looked straight across a small valley to the Chemin des Dames and the Fort de Malmaison—now no more than an irregular pile of earth-works rising against the sky-line.

On October 9th the convoy had to evacuate the billets we had originally occupied, and moved to another part of the town, in a small street just off the Reims road. Billets as before were in various houses: they were not bad billets, but we did not stay there long. On the 11th the Germans, in accordance with their usual practice, started a vigorous strafe all over the sector, with a view to using up all their remaining ammunition preparatory to a further retirement. At this time our relay-post was at the Carrières R.1., where we slept in a big subterranean quarry: a full hospital, with wards, dispensary, operating theatre etc. was functioning here, right in the bowels of the earth. The Triage was at

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the Soissons Abattoir, the G.B.D. having left Crouy for Nanteuil. On the 12th, the Ange Gardien was made a relay-post: as before at Nanteuil, it was weird to go up without hearing a single gun-shot. Still more extraordinary was it, when night came on, to see cars going up to Montparnasse and beyond with full lights on: one could scarcely credit one's senses. On the 13th the advancing infantry entered Laon: the same evening an aid-post was established in one of the *faubourgs*, while the relay-post was started at Chavignon—only to be moved forward again next morning. The scene that this ruined village presented that evening was a memorable one. Chavignon is pretty well rased to the ground: when our cars arrived, night had just come on: a large number of troops of all sorts had just marched in, and the whole place became one gigantic bivouac, lit by a hundred camp-fires which were built by the road-side, or in corners of battered walls where houses once were. Each fire gave forth a cheery little red glow, above which the smoke looked all rose-tinted in the flames; while round about, the fire-light played on the shaggy faces of half-a-dozen poilus, or threw into sharp silhouette their crouching figures. A succession of these fires dotted all over the village formed a truly striking and beautiful sight, and recalled somehow one of those colossal pictures, representing the bivouac of some army of olden time. But one could not repress the exclamation "By Jove,—if Jerry came over now!"

The following day the whole convoy moved up to Laon, settling into very bad billets in the Faubourg de Sémilly. This is on the Soissons road, at the foot of the hill on which Laon stands: all the roads up into the town were blocked by huge mine-craters, 30 or 40 feet deep: the Boche had exploded some fifty of these in different parts of the town, so that it was completely cut off for all wheeled traffic. Entering the streets of Laon, where every house flew the tricolour flag, and talking with the civilian

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population, who had been through four long years of captivity, one felt what a tremendous thing this release meant to them: and for once the flags seemed symbolical of something more than cheap patriotism. Through all those years, the folk had had to toil day in day out for their captors: they had witnessed the disgraceful treatment of the prisoners of war, and themselves had been ill-fed and often maltreated. Even at the very last, they had seen some 800 of their boys and young men deported by the Germans before abandoning the place. Small wonder that the women fell almost hysterically on the necks of the entering French troops, and the old men's eyes filled with tears: while the children ran out and joined hands with the Chasseurs and paraded the streets with them. The Frenchmen were giving away "souvenirs" right and left: half the girls in the town were wearing Croix de Guerre ribbons. Everywhere blue uniforms were welcomed: "Ah, madame," said an old man to a granny of 70 or more who was talking to some French soldiers "c'est beaucoup mieux, n'est-ce pas, les bleus que les gris!"

Happily the town itself has suffered but little. The barracks on the south side of the hill had been shelled a good deal, and the station completely burnt out: but the beautiful cathedral, with its four towers standing out on the hill-top, is untouched, except that four of the five great bells have been removed from the belfry. Several bronze statues have likewise been removed from various parts of the town, for the sake of the metal.

From Laon the aid-post was pushed forward at once to the village of Chambry, on the Marle road: to reach this place from Sémilly, we had at first to make a detour of several kilometers, owing to the blocking of the roads by mine-craters. We re-entered the town at the Faubourg de Vaux (by our old friend "Route 44,"—a very different sight here from what it is at the Reims end). The railway crossing on the Marle road just outside the town had been

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blown up, and the first day or two we had to thread our way between three or four huge craters. Gangs of civilian workmen, however, soon got to work,—only too glad to facilitate the advance of the troops who had liberated them.

It seemed very strange to have an aid-post in a village untouched by shell-fire, where civilians still lived: to go up over comparatively good roads, lined with unspoiled avenues of trees, through fields where not a shell-hole was to be seen. Yet such, at first, was the country round Chambry. The first few days mines were continually going up: by day the explosions only caused a slight tremor to be felt, unless close at hand, but at night the sky would redden with their lurid glare. Many out-lying farms and châteaux were mined in this way, delay-action fuses being attached. Indeed, one of our own posts, the Ferme Puisieux, an advanced regimental post from Chambry, was suspected of being thus mined.

During these days immediately after the big advance the Division had a particularly hard time, as again and again they attacked without artillery support, the guns not yet having come up. This meant heavy running for our cars: furthermore, as always in an advance, the Field Hospitals had not been able to keep pace with the infantry and we had long evacuations to make over roads which were soon in a very bad state. All cases had to be taken back to Pontarcher, the far side of Soissons,—a three-hours' run, and often more if there were bad stretcher cases on board. This long journey from north-east of Laon to south-east of Soissons constituted a sort of epitome of the convoy's life during the previous month: one passed successive billets and relay-posts and aid-posts, and what had once been "hot" corners, and so on: indeed, at Pontarcher one was almost linked up with the summer attacks, for La Vache Noire was only a few kilometers further.

On October 16th five members of the convoy[1] were

[1] Lieut. Bordes, B. Ardley, R. A. Bigland, R. W. Scrimgeour, and D. Wood.

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decorated by the Médecin-Divisionnaire with the Croix de Guerre. The General of the division was to have officiated, but he was required elsewhere in connection with the visit of Poincaré and some other government officials, who were in and about Laon most of the day. The ceremony took place in the grounds of the Hôtel-Dieu at Laon, where a number of civilians, including the nuns and *curé* from the Hôtel-Dieu itself, foregathered to watch. A square was formed by the *brancardiers*, a detachment of the Chasseurs with their bugle-band, and ourselves. The usual programme was followed, the band playing "God save the King" as funereally as ever. Towards the end of the ceremony a few shells came in, though on another part of the town: they were received by the civilians with shouts of derisive laughter,—a proof perhaps that they had not suffered much from bombardment. The ceremony was brought to a close by a sort of march-past, in which we long-limbed sons of Albion tried in vain to march in step with the diminutive chasseur: the time was altogether too quick, and before we were clear of the ground, both they and we gave way to most irregular and unceremonial laughter.

It was on the evening of the same day that the Ambulance 3/18, which had formerly been installed in underground quarters at Carrières R.1., started functioning at the Hôtel-Dieu. Forthwith all *graves blessés*, and those needing immediate operation, were brought here. The ascent into the town was circuitous and very steep, only one road being passable.

Meanwhile the French artillery had been rushed up with all possible speed: and after a night of incessant bombardment, which towards 6 a.m. reached an extraodinary degree of intensity, the division attacked once more on the morning of the 19th. The same morning the convoy base was moved forward to the Faubourg de Vaux: Chambry became a relay-post, from which the cars went

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on as required either to the Ferme Puisieux on the right, or straight on to La Maison Blanche, where further progress was effectually barred by three huge mine-craters right in the fairway. The road beyond Chambry led on through absolutely flat country. On the left, the two little villages of Barenton-Bugny and Barenton-Cel were that morning under heavy fire: the atmosphere was misty, and against the rain-clouds the flash of the bursting shrapnel could be clearly discerned, as at night-time, in addition to the drifting puffs of smoke: while from amongst the houses rose the thick black geysers from the "Jack Johnsons." It was strange to see the peaceful-looking little villages, with their pointed church-towers,—as yet they had suffered hardly at all—smiling calmly through all this welter of shell-fire: it was so different from the ordinary aspect of a ruined village "up the line."

Both at this time and in all the subsequent actions up to the end of the month, the Germans used almost exclusively machine-gun fire in the fighting-line, reserving their artillery, of which they had none too much, for bombardment behind the lines. Practically every man we carried had a bullet-wound.

On the morning of the 20th, one or two of our cars managed to get round the mine-craters at Maison Blanche by the fields: but the track soon became quite impassable for mud, and until a temporary road was laid across the craters on the 21st, H.M.L. plied continually between the Carrières post on the hill-crest down to the Maison Blanche, where an *équipe* of stretcher-bearers unloaded the patients, carried them across the craters, and loaded them up again in another ambulance the other side. On the 25th, the division attacked yet again: indeed, the attacks were at this time almost continuous. One aid-post was now at the Ferme Chantrud, beyond the Moulin de Verneuil: the other having been moved up first to Monceau-le-Wast and then to a solitary way-side tree

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between the villages of Fay-le-Sec and Grandlup. As one went up to these posts, one was surprised to see crowds of civilians returning already from Laon to the newly liberated villages, while yet the French guns were blazing away just in front. On the 26th Monceau-le-Wast, which up till then had not been altogether a healthy spot, became a relay-post: hence the cars went forward to the two regimental posts,—either that of the 172nd in the village of Grandlup, or to the chasseurs' post which was in the fields just on this side of the village. During these last days up at the front, several cars and drivers had very narrow escapes: the Boche developed an entirely reprehensible habit of putting over a sharp barrage just at the entrance of Grandlup. In the course of the month practically every car was hit, most of them several times: and every day some one would come in with fresh holes in his car. Perhaps among so many honourable scars, it is unnecessary to mention any particular buses: but No. 75 (if she still lives) can bear witness to the damage a shell landing just behind a bus can do, and the writer was himself privileged to hear the wingèd words which sped from the lips of No. 66's eloquent driver one night, when a shell landing amongst a horse convoy in front strewed the road with dying horses and thereby blocked his further passage.

Meanwhile, the division was becoming absolutely tired out: they had been in the line forty days or more, and had advanced nearly as many kilometers: they had attacked continually, and suffered in proportion. Rumours that they were to be relieved had been circulating for some days: but it was not till October 29th that they were realised. On that date, the 59th French division (containing a regiment of American black troops) relieved the 127th, and we gave over the aid-post service the same day. That evening at supper the general feeling of relief from the strain found expression in an entirely impromptu sing-song. For six weeks, men and cars had been

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subjected continuously to a heavy strain: never, perhaps, had they experienced such heavy shell-fire, directed with so little intermission both on the actual aid-posts and all along the roads: and the prospect of *repos* meant more now than it ever had done before. Hence it was that the sing-song "went" with all the swing and spirit of the "good old days": our steward had an inspiration, and dispensed *la gniole* to those who desired it: some "darkies" came in, and sang after their own manner: and we enjoyed ourselves as we hadn't done for many a long day.

On the 30th of October, we finally left the front and the Laon area for the *arrière* and *repos*. We moved first to the Camp du Moulin, near Bruyères, where we had a scratch game of footer, followed by lunch: in the afternoon we started off again down the all too well known Soissons road. Our destination was Septmonts, just off the Soissons—Château-Thierry road. The most interesting feature of this village was the ruin of a mediæval château, beneath whose towers the cars were parked. For billets we had a big Renaissance house, formerly the residence of the Bishops of Soissons; here each room had a great open fire-place, where whole logs were burned of an evening. Meanwhile rumours of a long run down south were gaining credence, and during the four days spent at Septmonts we put in a lot of hard work on the cars: they all needed washing—cleaning-brushes had lain idle for many a week: then there were greasers to be filled, wheels to be tested, and a hundred and one details requiring attention. On November 3rd it was announced officially that the Division was to entrain for the Vosges.

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THE AID-POST.

THE division had been in the line forty days or more, attacking nearly all the time. In front of Grandlup, the artillery was thundering away. Down in the cellar of a small house, we dozed on the straw. The din was terrific. First one, then another of the *brancardiers* remarks on it . . . "Ca tape ce soir." . . . "Ils y mettent qué'quechose, les Boches!" . . . "Ah, les saligauds! I' sont forts, ces cochons-là," . . . "Et puis on dit qu'ils n'ont plus d' munitions!" "Penses-tu!" A pause. Then "tu sais, mon vieux." . . . the speaker breaks off, but his silence is more expressive than any words could have been. Presently a voice shouts down the stairs. "Hé, les conducteurs là! Une voiture!" A number of wounded are waiting upstairs,—not bad cases, except one man who lies on a stretcher and moans occasionally. Whilst we start the engine up, the *brancardiers* load up in the darkness. "Deux couvertures, un brancard . . . Doucement, doucement . . . Attention à ton bras, mon pauv' vieux. Là, c'est ça." There is some muddle about the *affiches*. The doctor comes fussing round "Eh ben, quoi, sacré nom de Dieu! Qu'est-ce que vous faites là?" This poor chap on the stretcher is suffering badly. "Oh, là-là, oh, là-là!" he keeps murmuring. "J'en ai assez, moi." He tries to turn over. "Bouge pas, bouge pas." A crump lands not far away. A little *Chasseur* in dark blue uniform is saying some uncomplimentary things about the *Service de Santé* in general, and his own regimental doctor in

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particular. "Tu parles d'une bande d'embusqués." But he is the least badly wounded of all, and the others soon shut him up with a grunt and a "ta gueule, toi: toi, t'as rien à te plaindre." "Mais dépêchez-vous, nom de Dieu!"—the doctor is coming round again. "Combien avez-vous?" "Sept, M. le Major: six assis, et un couché." Still the affiches aren't quite ready: but another shell lands quite near. "Damn the affiches—let's get a move on!" "What the hell are they playing at?" At last, "Ca n'y fait rien, va! Montez, montez-y!" A man with a splintered arm knocks against the stretcher-rack, "Aïe, aïe!"—an involuntary cry of pain is wrung from him. "Tout le monde est là?" "Oui, oui,—ça y est, ça y est." A *brancardier* is coming down with us. "Vous êtes prêt?" "Oui, oui, oui: 'faut pas s' amuser içi, vous savez. . . . Allez, allez, allez. . . . Allez, houp!" We're not sorry to get away. Why the deuce should they be shelling now?—the ravitaillement-carts have come and gone hours ago. "Ah, les vaches!" The car moves off down the narrow street, turns the corner, and starts on the dark, tedious journey down to the *ambulance* at Laon, loaded with its freight of mutilated humanity.

It's a ghastly business, if you think about it. But you don't. After all . . . que voulez-vous? C'est la guerre.

—N.M.J.

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Chapter IX.

On November 4th we at length started off on the three days' journey down to Charmes-sur-Moselle. We lined up on the hill that rises out of Septmonts in the glorious sunshine of an autumn morning, when all the hills were russet-tinted with the autumnal woods. Our course lay at first along the Aisne valley, which presented a very beautiful scene, save where on the far side of the river the hill-side was dotted with the skeletons of what were once living villages: now only their ruined shells remained to witness to the flood-tide of war that had swept over them. Opposite Condé we branched off along the Vesle valley to Braisne: it was interesting to revisit the place, in view of the poignant memories we had of it in connection with the May retreat. The town had not suffered as much as the heavy fighting that took place there had led us to expect: all bridges had of course been blown up, and the houses ransacked: but the damage was not irreparable. Limé, on the other hand, had suffered far worse: the church had been destroyed, and the château in the grounds of which we were billeted when the Germans broke through had been heavily bombarded. A short distance beyond Limé, we drew up by the wayside, and walked across the fields

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to the cemetery below Mont Notre Dame (the church on the hill top is now no more), where we were glad of the opportunity to visit the graves of Hugo Jackson and N. E. Gripper. Thence we continued by Bazoches to Fismes; here it seemed hardly credible that such destruction could have been wrought in so comparatively short a time,—a destruction so complete that to rebuild the town will assuredly be the work of many years. Between Fismes and Jonchery, we met our old friends S.S.A. 20, who were coming down with the 45th Division from the Asfeld region. We turned off to Muizon for lunch, and while this was in preparation were able to pay a hurried visit to Châlons-sur-Vesle. We had been billeted in this place for five months, and had got to know a number of the village-folk, so that we retained very pleasant memories of the place: all the more unwelcome was the sight that met our eyes—half the houses smashed, the square all scattered with débris, the trees torn and mutilated: and, of course, not a civilian was to be seen in the place.[1] It was interesting to wander round the old billets: the mess-room (a wooden shanty or lean-to) had disappeared, but our old acetylene generator had survived the Boche occupation: so had a few old Buick headlamps. No. 2 billet was partially smashed, and No. 3 had had a shell or two through the roof: as for No. 4, it simply was not, the top part of the house having completely collapsed.

After lunch we continued along the Reims road, which is crossed by a system of trenches from Champigny towards Thillois: the latter village is very badly smashed, having been taken and retaken several times by the Zouaves of the 45th division. Unfortunately we didn't pass right through the city of Reims, but skirted it by the *faubourgs*, so that it was hardly possible to judge how

[1] It may interest members of the convoy to know that in a letter received in June, 1919, from Châlons, the writer was informed that all the former inhabitants of the village had returned.

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much the place had suffered since May. We left Reims by the Cormontreuil road: in the village of that name we were temporarily held up, and it was here that we heard the news of the armistice with Austria. . . . *"y a bon!"* The last part of the run was straight along the Châlons main-road, which we covered at no mean speed: the sun was beginning to disappear behind the Montagne de Reims on our right, and it was late in the afternoon when the cars lined up with a grand sweep round in the spacious barrack-square of the Caserne Tirlet. It was on this self-same spot that the convoy landed up with the newly-acquired Buicks from Dunkerque, in February, 1917, and vivid reminiscences were the order of the day. In the evening some of us revisited old haunts in the town: and the timely arrival of a big consignment of cigarettes that night filled with joy the worshippers of the god Nicotene.

We were awakened early on the morning of November 5th by the calling of an interminable roll of the Frenchmen quartered in the barracks. After a scratch breakfast round the kitchen, we filled up with petrol, and at about 10 a.m. started off along the St. Menehould road. Once more we crossed the dreary tracts of "La Champagne Pouilleuse," till we could see the wooded hills of the Argonne away to the left. We stopped just outside Revigny for lunch, and then ran on down the pretty little valley of the river Ornain to Bar-le-Duc, which was full of Yanks. Thence we continued along the same valley, where now the road ran alongside the *Canal de la Marne au Rhin:* on our right the higher ground ended abruptly in a series of broken hills which abutted immediately on the river valley. At dusk we pulled up outside Ligny-en-Barrois, which had been specified as our destination: but we were told that not only were there no available billets, but, as the place was in the zone of the American armies, we should not be allowed to stay there for the night at all.

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We therefore carried on another twenty kilometers to Démange-aux-Eaux: all lights were switched on, and the effect was quite picturesque. At Démange, billets were purely nominal: but we parked the buses in the main street, back-on to the houses, and slept as best we might.

After covering about one hundred and ten kilometers each of the first two days, we had a slightly shorter distance to go on November 6th. The last day's journey took us over some interesting country, all of it new to us: we crossed the Meuse river just beyond Vaucouleurs, and passed through a very jolly corner of the department of Meurthe-et-Mozelle: here were rolling hills well covered with birch and beech-woods, the latter displaying glorious patches of autumnal colouring. Beyond Vézelise, a town of narrow, winding streets and sharp corners, we met numbers of R.A.F. lorries: there would appear to have been a good deal of British aerial activity in these parts. We stopped for lunch on the slope of the hill leading down into the village of Gripport: from here we had a jolly view into the wide valley of the river Moselle below. Immediately after lunch we crossed into the Vosges department, and followed the valley a few kilometers along to Charmes. Here the Division had already arrived. After a long wait, during which a game of football, in which "Billy" and "Boy" took an energetic part, provided some diversion, we were sent on to Portieux: here again we had no billets, but slept as usual in the cars.

The next morning, two cars were sent to the divisional *Etat-Major*:[1] the rest of the convoy moved out of Portieux, and forthwith we proceeded to occupy a tiny hamlet among the hills, known as Varmonzey: here we took

[1] During our subsequent wanderings, these cars remained with the Etat-Major, two others being attached to the G.B.D. Later, another car was for a fortnight or so attached to the Escadrille B.R. 7 (Aviation) and yet another to the Etat-Major of the 6th Army Corps. Practically all the evacuation work was done by these detached cars, which moved everywhere with their respective units, and were often out of touch with the convoy for days on end. Latterly they were changed from time to time.

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over what billets we could find, amongst the eleven houses of which the hamlet consisted. In a couple of days we had settled in quite comfortably: the mess-room was a sort of cart-shed with an improvised trestle-table which served our purposes very well: the cars were parked wherever there was room, those that had to go "into garage" being backed into various old sheds and under archways, by arrangement with the owners thereof. Our office was in the *Mairie*,—a single small room containing all the little insignia of the mayorial dignity. The *maire* himself was a priceless figure: he might be met about the hamlet pushing along a big hand-cart full of cabbages or turnips,—with several days' growth of grey beard on his scrubby chin. The "lady-mayoress" was said to take in what laundry-work there was to be done in so small a place. The Vosges people were on the whole very friendly to us. They have a curious accent in these parts, pronouncing the "an" sound as if it were "in": also they frequently aspirate their "h's." It was at this time that the convoy was cited in divisional orders, under date November 7th: though it was not until some weeks later that we received the official announcement of the citation.

On November 10th we had our last glimpse of active warfare—an enemy 'plane passed overhead, his course marked by the usual long line of shrapnel-puffs. Meanwhile, rumours succeeded each other with astonishing rapidity: stories of the German plenipotentaries' arrival at Senlis were followed by reports that the armistice had already been signed. We didn't get the official news until about 10-30 a.m. on the morning of the 11th, when our D.R. brought back the news from Charmes. We felt somewhat cut off in that tiny little hamlet among the hills on that memorable day; and we wondered how the great outside world was taking the news. Towards dusk, the churches in the surrounding villages began to ring their joy-bells, and far and wide the cheerful peals rang across

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the darkling hills. After supper, six cars took us, with such of the villagers as wanted to go, into Charmes, where a dance was announced for 8 p.m. We found the square bedecked with flags, illumined with hanging lights, and crowded with a wildly joyous throng of people,—chiefly French soldiers, though nearly all the civilians were out in the streets, and British R.A.M.C. and R.A.F. men were there. Everywhere was noise and excitement: the soldiers formed themselves into mock bands, performing on tin-trumpets or anything else that came to hand: Chinese lanterns and flags and cockades, as well as lighted torches, were waved madly aloft. The cafés were doing a roaring trade—*chasseurs à cheval* were riding their horses right in up to the bar, while others were going round smashing windows and glasses merely for the joy of it. Presently the bugle-band of the 355th turned up: the torch-bearers formed up behind them, and in a few minutes all those hundreds of people were surging along the streets of the town in a gigantic procession, singing and shouting and yelling. Flares and fire-works were continually sent up, so that the houses were illumined in a lurid light: we processed right round the town down to the Moselle bridges, and then back again to the square. Here the scene in front of the Hôtel de Ville was a memorable one: from one side of the square to the other stretched a sea of faces,—hundreds of men and women all wild with joy at the tremendous news. The band struck up a tune, and they started to dance—though the people were far too crowded and far too excited to dance properly. Several times we cleared a space by joining hands in a long line and sweeping right across, but in two minutes it was filled up again. All sorts of nationalities were represented in that throng: Arabs and Russians, Annamites and "Chinks," as well as Britishers and a few Yanks, were mingled in the French crowd. Indiscriminate kissing was the order of the day—"tout est permis—c'est

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l' armistice!" . . . It was 10-30 before we gathered round the cars once more, and beguiled the short run home with speculations as to when we should start to move forward.

Our time at Varmonzey was a time of unsettlement: just when the cars needed more than the usual amount of attention, we were continually on the *alerte*. When we finally did have to move, at half a day's notice, three cars were left behind, to follow on next day with the Workshop. It was in the afternoon of November 15th, in very cold weather, that the convoy moved off to Menarmont, going by way of Charmes and the Bois de Charmes, where the Germans were held up in 1914. At Menarmont, there were no billets available so we went on to Baccarat, where we arrived about 6 p.m. Here we had billets of sorts in Denoevre,—the upper part of the town looking down on the river valley: many men, however, preferred to sleep in their cars. The mess-room only seated about half a dozen: and it was here that we started the practice,—afterwards pretty generally followed—of taking our meals and feeding in small groups in the houses of friendly civilians of the vicinity.

Baccarat is a little town on the river Meurthe: the whole of the central part was ruthlessly burnt out by the Germans in 1914, though after that time, in spite of its proximity to the front, which was only about ten kilometers distant, it suffered very little. From the higher part of the town, there is a fine view up the valley to the peaks of the Vosges mountains in the direction of St. Dié. It was at Baccarat that we met the first batches of repatriated prisoners, including a number of Britishers taken in the March and May offensives. They had just crossed the lines,—their prison doors having been flung open, and they themselves told to find their way back as best they could. Their stories of the way they had been treated were sickening enough,—but the whole world has

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since then heard their tale, and we need not speak of it here.

From Baccarat a car was sent to an aviation squadron (B.R. 7) at Burthécourt, not far from Nancy: and as a number of the convoy cars evacuated on Nancy at various times, some description of the town may not be out of place. Like all the towns and villages in the district, it was at this time bedecked with flags and all sorts of decorations. By far the best part of the town is the magnificent Place Stanislas: here a huge square is formed by the Hôtel de Ville on the south side, the Episcopal Palace on the east, and the theatre on the west: while northwards a great Arc de Triomphe leads through to the Place de la Carrière. In the centre of the square stands a statue of Stanislaus, an ex-king of Poland and last of the Dukes of Lorraine, who had their seat at Nancy. It appears that under the beneficent rule of these Dukes, Nancy was a centre of art and of culture even before the Paris salons had begun to attract the world's great artists and men of letters. The oldest part of the town is the Grande Rue, where is the Palais Ducal, and further down a massive fourteenth century gate-way, with the double Lorraine cross cut in the walls. Fortunately the best part of the town has suffered very little if at all from the repeated air raids to which the place was subjected during the war, most of the damage having been done in the neighbourhood of the station.

It was on November 17th that the convoy left Baccarat, and in the course of this day's run we crossed the old lines. Coming from the awful devastation of the Aisne district, we were struck by the absence of any such wholesale destruction on this front: the lines must have remained practically unchanged throughout the war, and one could imagine the sort of "peace-time warfare" that went on in such a sector. Indeed, we had often heard from the Chasseurs and others what life in the front lines

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could be like in these parts. Quite close up to the lines, the villages had been inhabited by civilians all through the war, and had suffered very little from bombardment. At Domêvre the German front line ran actually through the village itself—yet the place was far less damaged than many villages some miles from the line on other fronts. The roads were in excellent condition except where actually crossed by the opposing trench-systems. Our destination was Cirey, a little frontier town which we found *en fête:* the French troops had been accorded an enthusiastic welcome that morning, and the fact that the general commanding the division was a native of Cirey added to the impressiveness of the occasion.

We were billeted for the night in a large château, and next morning we moved on across the frontier into what had been "German" Lorraine. Here we found ourselves amongst a German-speaking people, and very few of the inhabitants, in Hartzweiler at any rate (where we stopped for the night) had any knowledge of French[1]: but it should be borne in mind that we only passed through the extreme south-east corner of Lorraine. The language difficulty was more than compensated by the great hospitality shown to us both here and subsequently in Alsace. Hartzweiler was packed with troops, and billets were at a premium: however, we managed to find room somehow, and next day took possession of the station premises. Here the sight of our cook in the early morning vainly endeavouring to get a fire going in the snow-covered station yard melted the heart of the good lady of the place: she invited him to use her kitchen stove, and before long we had installed ourselves in kitchen, office and waiting-room.

We left Hartzweiler at mid-day, and had a glorious

[1] Generally speaking, more French was spoken in Lorraine than in Alsace, the German language (or Alsatian, which is a *patois* of German) becoming more general as we progressed eastwards. This of course amongst the peasant folk was only to be expected. The better educated people, in Alsace as in Lorraine, knew French thoroughly.

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run over the Vosges into Alsace. Unfortunately the road was crowded with troops the whole way: consequently, from a driver's point of view, conditions were not favourable for viewing the wonderful scenery. But no one who crossed the chain of the Vosges is likely to forget it: the roads were for the most part magnificently engineered, so that as you came round the top-most bend, you saw the road coiling like some gigantic snake down the mountain-side, or looked down from giddy heights upon the tower of some village church hundreds of feet below. Our destination was Hengweiler, where we spent two nights, and were treated with the utmost hospitality. We were billeted out in groups of four or five: in one house at least the people insisted that our men should have their meals with them; they killed and cooked chickens expressly for them, and provided all sorts of delicacies, including abundant drinks of "Schnapps," which came out at all hours of the day and night. A game of football in which we indulged provided a great deal of amusement, and evidently constituted something of a novelty in those parts.

On the 21st we went on to Littenheim, where we were billeted in the school. It should be remarked that all these short moves were due to the fact that we were moving forward slowly day by day with the Division—an arrangement which for an ambulance-convoy is not without considerable inconvenience. The chief event at Littenheim was the arrival of many belated mails. On the 22nd we moved once again to Bernolsheim, where we stayed two nights, being again billeted out in different houses and meeting with the customary Alsatian hospitality. After two nights here, we moved on the 24th to Schirrhofen: this place was crowded out with troops, but we only stayed one night, moving on next day to Oberbetschdorf. Here our Division took part in a triumphal entry on the 25th, and the Médecin-Divisionnaire insisted on our men taking part in the procession.

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Meanwhile, the various cars attached to different divisional units were all moving forward in the same direction. The two cars with the divisional *Etat-Major* preceded the convoy, taking approximately the same course: they reached Salz about the time the convoy got to Oberbetschdorf, and it was there that the Rhine was first seen. The Army Corps car spent some time at Trois Fontaines, and afterwards was stationed at Brumath. The aviation car spent nearly a week in Lorraine, at Lörchingen, before moving forward via Saarburg (Sarrebourg) and the famous Zabern (Saverne) pass to Hagenau.

These first days in Lorraine and Alsace were full of interest. In Lorraine all the villages were decorated with the tricolour flag: almost every evening torchlight processions *(Retraites aux Flambeaux)* were held, followed by dances, at which the girls wore their national costume of Lorraine. This consists of a velvety corsage, and a skirt of some brightly coloured satiny fabric, with rich silken shawls and a white bonnet: the effect was most pleasing and picturesque. The French troops everywhere received an enthusiastic welcome, being met at the entrance of every village by crowds of children yelling "Vive La France!" with all the strength of their lungs: indeed, their shrill-voiced persistency became somewhat aggravating. Often enough, these were the only words of French they knew,—and even these they knew but imperfectly, as was shown by a big festoon at one village, bearing the legend "Vive le Frans!" At night, flares of all sorts and colours went up from all over the country-side, in celebration of *La Lorraine Libérée.*

After crossing into Alsace, we found a new country where the people, the language they spoke, and the villages and country-side in which they lived were all of a type not hitherto met with in any part of France which we knew: and during the six or seven weeks which we

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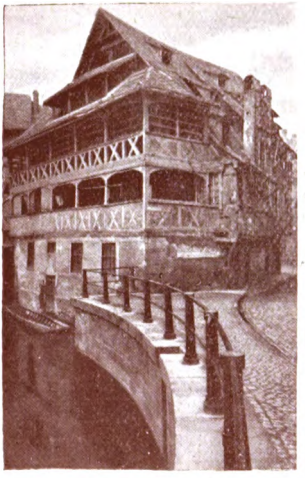
Rabenhof.



Klein Frankreich.

VIEWS OF OLD STRASBOURG

Village Street, Alsace.

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spent in these parts, we received some very delightful impressions both of the country and of the people,—impressions that are not likely soon to fade. This long, narrow strip of country called Alsace, is situated in the fertile valley of the Rhine: it is bounded on the south by the Swiss mountains, eastwards by the Rhine, beyond which rise the Black Forest hills, and on the west by the picturesque chain of the Vosges mountains, with their jagged outline: a characteristic of these mountains is the number of old ruins—convents or châteaux—which crown some of the peaks, such as the ex-Kaiser's palace of Höhkönigsberg near Colmar, and the convent of St. Odile in the Barr district. The hills look down on a fertile valley-land carefully cultivated: even after four years of war, one was conscious of a feeling of prosperity in the rural life of the country, and in happier times of peace it must indeed be a land "flowing with milk and honey." Small wonder that through the ages rival princes have fought for the possession of the land, right down to our own day: and it is not only in modern times that it has merited the title of *l' Alsace martyre.*

The villages are most picturesque, all of a very definite type. The houses are usually half-timbered, with tiled eaves over each storey: the walls are painted with a white or pale blue wash, which gives an impression of cleanliness. It is surprising how big some of these villages really are, far bigger than they at first appear. Each cottage has its little *basse-cour*, with its quaint long-handled wooden pump: a small cow-shed, with perhaps two or three cows: probably a pig or two: and any amount of poultry, particularly geese. Under the eaves the yellow heads of maize are hung out to dry: stacks of firewood are kept in the sheds. A noticeable feature of the country-side is the absence of any outlying farmsteads: all the fields are worked from the villages. On the other hand, each cottage is very largely self-supporting: home-made

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butter, home-laid eggs, home-grown vegetables are used. Nearly every house has an oven built out from the house-wall, and here a lot of home baking is done.

Cows as well as bullocks are largely used for ploughing and for draught purposes: this is naturally not conducive to speedy travelling, but somehow it seems to suit the leisurely rural atmosphere. A noticeable feature of the country-side during the winter months are the hop-fields: here the long poles are stacked in piles of 30 or 40, supported in a manner suggestive of "piled arms." The country is well-wooded and well-watered: in the background, there are continual glimpses of mountain peaks, whether they be the Vosges or the Black Forest hills.

The chief towns of Alsace are Strasbourg, in the north,—the capital of German "Elsass-Lothringen,"—Colmar, and to the south Mulhouse: the latter is important as an industrial centre, but of no great interest in other respects. Colmar has some pleasing old back-streets and corners: its chief interest, however, lies in the fact that it is situated just opposite the most interesting part of the Vosges mountains, where they are nearest to the Rhine. It was at Strasbourg that, on November 22nd, General Gouraud made his triumphal entry. Three days later, the town was officially occupied by France, with the entry of Maréchal Pétain: and some of us were able to witness this event. The whole town was *en fête*, every street displaying a long line of flags and decorations of all sorts: the pavements were packed with onlookers, the roadways being kept clear for the procession by cordons of soldiers. All the girls who had them wore their Alsatian costumes: these resemble the Lorraine dress in their riot of rich colour, but the head dress is very different, consisting of a big black *noeud* or silken bow, which is very picturesque. Many hundreds of these girls took part in the procession and helped to line the streets.

As a military display, and from the spectacular point

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of view, the procession was certainly impressive. Khaki clad *tirailleurs*, with their red fez caps, passed to the weird music of their special *fanfare:* little *Chasseurs à pied*, in dark blue, were followed by the good old regiments of the line, the world-famous *poilus:* then there were units of cavalry, of artillery, of engineers,—every branch of the service was represented. "Ils ne sont pas donc tous morts, les Français," a French captain remarked as he watched them pass. Afterwards the Archbishop received Maréchal Pétain at the west door of the cathedral, and conducted him up the aisle to the raised choir. A short service of dedication was held, in which in the name of the church the Archbishop handed over to France the cathedral of Strasbourg.

Similar triumphal entries were being held on a smaller scale in practically every village and town in Alsace during those historic days of November. Reference has already been made to the entry into the little village of Oberbetschdorf: and at Hagenau quite an effective procession was held on November 26th. It was rather amusing to observe the quick-changes which the local café-signs, as well as many of the street-names, were undergoing about this time: the Kaiserplatz became "Place de la République," and the Wilhelms and Kronprinzes and similar Hohenzollern bombast were replaced by signs "Aux Alliés," "Aux Libérateurs," etc. None welcomed the French occupying troops with more unfeigned pleasure than the painters and house-decorators, who were doing a roaring trade.

Meanwhile, through the system of billeting out in the cottages by twos and threes, we were able to get to know the folk a little. Mention has already been made of the extraordinary hospitality of these country-people: no one who enjoyed it could have any doubt of its sincerity. Gifts of milk, butter, home-baked bread, acorn-coffee (the supplies of real coffee had given out long before), as well

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as fruit, were showered upon us. In the evenings we would sit round the fire and converse with them as best we might: perhaps a few of us would gather together and sing some of our convoy songs: and afterwards as they sat at their work, the girls would sing old German folk-songs, and the old father might join in now and then: simple ditties mostly they were, with a touch of melancholy, but very charming to hear. The Alsatian language is a sort of "patois" of German: anyone speaking *hoch deutsch* can make himself understood, and can follow the gist of the conversation: but the differences both of form and pronunciation are very considerable. Furthermore, each village has its own peculiar variations of the patois, so that a man's village may often be known from his speech.

On November 29th we left Oberbetschdorf—much against our will—for Oberhofen, a village about six kilometers from Hagenau. Here once more we were billeted out, and most of us were very comfortable: for mess-room we had one of the class-rooms of the village school, and after the first day or two, the cars were parked in the school playground. To our great annoyance, after we had been here less than a week, we had to move on a distance of less than two kilometers to Bischweiler, to make room for a colonial regiment for which our billets were required. A large number of cars were "off the road," and the move (which took place on December 5th) consisted simply of a succession of towings, by the buses that could run, of those that couldn't. The billets at Bischweiler were far from satisfactory: the cars were in a muddy and insanitary yard: for sleeping-quarters, we had a draughty, albeit fairly dry loft, full of big sacks of hops, situated immediately over a big roomful of French refugees from Saales. These refugees were a constant source of annoyance, not only on account of the noise they made up to the early hours of the morning, but also because of their assiduity in stealing tools, kit, etc., from our cars.

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At Bischweiler work went on fairly satisfactorily. At the same time, the men took it in turn to go into Strasbourg for the day: and on December 9th nearly the whole convoy was able to be present at the big fête at Strasbourg in honour of the visit of President Poincaré and M. Clemenceau, who were accompanied by a number of important military and political personages. The place was crowded with civilians and with French troops: from the surrounding towns and villages all who could flocked into the capital. Once more the *Alsaciennes* thronged the streets, dressed in the national costume. In the morning the President gave an address from the balcony of the Imperial Palace in the Kaiserplatz (now Place de la République): amongst the generals present were Haig, Pershing, Joffre, Foch, Pétain and Gouraud, with several minor stars or satellites. In the afternoon a great procession filed past the grand stand in the Place de la République, where "les deux Présidents" and the great military leaders stood. By far the most interesting personalities were those of Clemenceau and Foch: the politician, with his stooping carriage, deep set eyes, and white moustaches covering a sinister droop about the mouth, giving an impression of bull-dog strength: the soldier looking more like a man of letters, with a refined face suggestive of tremendous intellectual power.

This scene in the Place de la République was very striking: on the steps and balconies, up in the windows and out on the roofs of the buildings, as well as on the pavements and amongst the branches of the trees, every available nook was occupied by onlookers: the brilliant uniforms of the French officers, and the gay dresses of the girls, added a wealth of variety and colour to the scene. The enthusiasm was far greater than at the official entry of Maréchal Pétain. The march-past lasted a considerable time: besides the regular troops taking part, a squadron of whippet tanks drove by. After the troops came

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representatives of the various Guilds and Societies of Strasbourg, each carrying their banners: then students from the University: then veterans of 1870: and last of all, lads and lasses from the surrounding villages, all in national dress. Each guild, society, or village had its band, and the strains of "*Madelon*," the French Tipperary, alternated with the good old "*Sambre et Meuse*" or the staccato notes of "*Mariette*." Strasbourg is a very fine town: the chief feature of interest is, of course, the Cathedral, whose tall spire dominates the town on all sides. The view from the tower is very fine: on the one side rises the chain of the Vosges mountains, on the other just across the Rhine, are the hills of the Black Forest: southwards, a grey line marks the Swiss mountains: immediately below, the picturesque roofs of the town are seen clustering round the great pile, and amongst them here and there a stork's nest can be discerned, built on some chimney-stack. The interior of the building is somewhat dark, so that it is not easy to appreciate the proportions of the lofty Gothic nave and raised Romanesque choir. In the south transept is an astronomical clock, with mechanically-worked images, etc., recalling that of Beauvais. The river Ill, with the canal, forms a complete circle round the central part of the town: and some of the old quarters by the river-side are very picturesque, with their mediaeval houses and wooden galleries and narrow streets. The modern part of the town is also very fine: it is well laid out and contains some good public buildings. During the first week or two of December, it was interesting to go out to the Pont de Kehl, by the Rhine-side, and watch the Alsatian soldiers returning from Germany: or to wander down by the pontoon bridge, at the far side of which stood the German sentry, wearing his shrapnel helmet and with bayonet fixed.

The billets at Bischweiler became worse with the advent of bad weather: there was nothing to do in the

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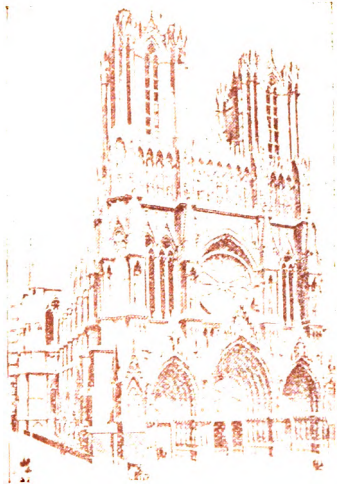
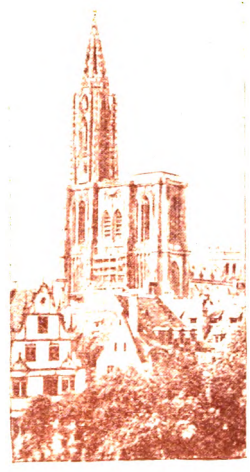
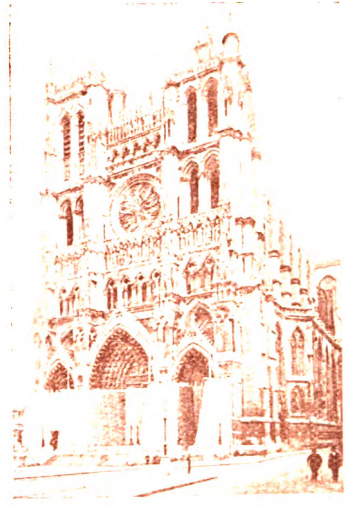


Reims



Strasbourg



Some Famous Cathedrals

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evenings except to make the round of the cinemas and cafés, or to indulge in billiards when a table could be secured. Indeed, the "Zum Goldenen Loewen" became the rendez-vous for a sort of "Club des Anglais." In the barn we did our best to make ourselves comfortable by "digging ourselves in,"—a process which consisted of piling up the great hop-sacks round our beds and stretching blankets overhead, thus forming a series of little dens which could be made more or less cosy.

On December 12th four cars were sent to the Centre Hospitalier (Ambulance 19/6) at Hagenau; these cars were at first on duty every third day only, sharing the work with cars of two other divisional sections belonging to the sixth corps. The work was all Corps d' Armée work, and consisted chiefly of evacuations to and from various barracks and hospitals in the town: occasionally patients were taken in to Strasbourg. We had cars occupied on this work (though the number was latterly reduced to two) up till the time of our departure from Alsace.

Owing to the bad weather and worse billets, Christmas passed without any great celebrations on the convoy. A concert given in the town on the 24th, at which a number of national songs of Alsace were sung, provided some of us with a pleasant diversion. The Christmas-tree was very much in evidence: even in the smallest cottage-window one noticed at least a branch of fir, and indeed it is said that the custom of having Christmas-trees originated in Alsace, spreading first to Germany, and thence all over Europe. In the evening a *Retraite aux Flambeaux* was held, in spite of the pouring rain. On the 25th we enjoyed a very excellent Christmas dinner (if we did not give our appetites quite such free rein as the previous year, it was none the worse for that). During this meal, Colonel Barry paid us a flying visit: afterwards, various little odds and ends—pipes, mirrors,

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pencils, etc.—were distributed by the generosity of the French military authorities, who had found them left behind by the departed Boche!

On Boxing Day we moved to far better billets in Steinstrasse: here we had a good yard for the cars, and a large empty house, with parquet floors and electric lighting, for the men. The mess-room was a large room with long wooden tables and a big stove. The place was formerly part of a spinning-mill, though since the war it had chiefly been used for the fabrication of paper "substitutes." Here we settled in very comfortably: work was very slack, the only running being a *ramassage* each afternoon: soon after the New Year, even that ceased. A number of football fixtures were arranged and played: a very good game against Bischweiler resulted in a win for us by four goals to three. Twice we sent over a team to play Hagenau: on New Year's Day we played the 29th Chasseurs, whom we easily defeated.

It was on New Year's Day, also, that the first batch of men was demobilised from the convoy: these were all students. (One or two others had already departed on leave, and did not return.) The feeling that the convoy was already breaking up was not a pleasant one, and we were sorry that we could not all stay together till the end.

The last three weeks of our stay in Alsace were not enlivened by any event of outstanding interest. On January 3rd some excitement in the little town was caused by the visit of Generals Castelnau and Gouraud, on the occasion of the decoration with various *fourragères* of the regiments in our division: the parade and march-past were held on the football ground. Latterly many members of the convoy got to know various Alsatian families in the place: the doors of many homes were thrown open to us, and we were welcomed and entertained in a way that we shall not forget. For many of us, some of

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our pleasantest recollections of these armistice days are bound up with memories of the kindness of the folk of Alsace.

On January 19th we were able to play off a fixture to which the whole convoy, and particularly the members of the football team, had been looking forward for some time,—the match against the city of Strasbourg. The match was played on the Strasbourg ground, before a large crowd of spectators: and though we were sorry to lose, all will agree that it was a good game, particularly in the second half, and that the better side won. The Strasbourg team showed a capacity for combination and a knowledge of the game which no French team, of all those that we had met in the course of our wanderings, had ever equalled.

On the morning of January 21st we at length bade a long farewell to Alsace, and with just enough drivers to man the cars started the long journey up to Dunkerque. A few kilometers from Bischweiler the Overland collided with a French touring-car: the fault was entirely the Frenchman's, but that was small consolation to our O.C. for being deprived yet once more of his "tourer." We left the Overland at Saverne (where we had lunch) and then wound our way up the long hill over the Vosges, through pine-woods white with hoar-frost. As we reached the top, we cast a last glance over the fair land of Alsace that lay stretched like a map below us, dotted here and there with white villages on which the fitful sun's rays fell in patches of soft, hazy light. It was from this point that Louis XVI. once exclaimed, as he gazed upon that panorama, "*Quel beau jardin!*" and such indeed was the impression that many of us carried away, as we left behind us the hills which shut off like a barrier this fertile valley land.

We parked that night in a *caserne* at Sarrebourg, and the next day entered once more upon that ugly tract of

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land on which the war has wrought its dreadful havoc. We crossed the old lines within a few hundred yards of the Lorraine frontier, and partook of a scratch meal of "emergency" rations on the outskirts of Nancy. We reached Toul that evening, early enough to have a look round the town before nightfall. It is a strongly fortified little place, with narrow streets which were at that time crowded with American soldiers: the chief buildings of interest are the Cathedral and the Hôtel de Ville, which stand side by side. Midday on the 23rd found us very cold and very hungry at St. Dizier, where we started the practice, soon to become more or less regular, of eating our lunch in the nearest available café. That evening we arrived at Vitry-le-François, and parked under the old market-roof: this place, with its old wooden beams and red tiles, was erected in the XVIIth century, to serve as a place of worship while the cathedral was in course of construction in the adjoining square. It was at Vitry that we left the old Federal to her fate: this seemed a pity, as her engine had recently been very thoroughly overhauled by P.E.D.: however, her wheels and body-work generally were in a condition which was pronounced to be unsafe, and (to the no small relief of her rag-time driver) she was sent to the *parc*. On the morning of the 25th we started off with a non-stop run of 65 kilometers, right across that dreary waste of flat, barren plain with which we were by now only too familiar. The last time we had traversed it had been on the occasion of the historic run from Passavant to Meaux, when we were bound for the "Great Push": it was a pleasant contrast now to be on the road to demobilisation and Blighty. We lunched at La Ferté-Gaucher, and arrived during the afternoon at Lagny, some thirty kilometers outside Paris. Here three more of our number left us for demobilisation. Two very welcome days' rest enabled us to attend to a lot of minor but very necessary repairs here, as well as to pay a

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farewell visit to the metropolis; the city was very full owing to the Peace Conference, which had then been sitting for several days.

After the necessary formalities of demobilisation had been completed at the O.S.A.[1] in Paris,[2] we set off on the morning of January 27th more or less concurrently with S.S.A. 19, whom we had followed to the capital at an interval of only a day or two. The journey hitherto had been dry, though bitterly cold: but from Lagny onwards we found the country-side muffled in a blanket of snow, which in places rendered progress slightly difficult. Our course lay by Chantilly, Creil, and Clermont to Breteuil, where we had lunch. Hereabouts we passed through places which had been familiar to us during our first winter down south,—places of mixed memories: Esquennoy, for instance. . . We ran through Amiens without stopping, though we had time to note the very considerable damage done to one quarter of the town during the German push of the previous spring. We arrived at Doullens, our destination for the night, almost simultaneously with S.S.A. 19, both convoys arriving by "instalments." Doullens is not an attractive place: even the most moderate of tongue dubbed it "a rotten hole." If a really vividly-worded characterisation of the place is desired, application should be made to the drivers of some of the cars which got stuck on the hill just outside the town next morning (January 28th). The roads were covered with snow: the first few cars managed, not without much side-slipping, to climb to the top of the hill: but owing to a series of unavoidable stops part way up, the later cars, some of which were towing or being towed, were quite unable to get any grip on the surface, which was becoming rapidly worse, and spent all day attempting to overcome this obstacle: being finally towed up by

[1] *Officier des Sections des Alliés.*

[2] Here also No. 66 was left, with a big-end bearing run out.

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British Army lorries late in the afternoon. Meanwhile the vanguard pushed on by way of St. Pol, Lillers and Aire (a zone occupied entirely by Portuguese troops, whose bluish grey uniforms some of us first mistook for those of the W.V.R.C.!) to St. Omer, where we had lunch as usual in a café: and then on through the old familiar country-side to Bergues. Here the Argyll, with seven ambulances and the Vulcan, drew up by the canal-side and waited an hour or more for the rest of the convoy: no more cars appeared however, and as dusk came on we set off again on the final run to Malo-les-Bains, arriving at H.Q. a little after 6 p.m. (January 28th). The majority of the cars turned up during the night, only the Austin (with magneto trouble) and No. 76 (with a bearing run out) being left behind, to be recovered a day or two later.

So ended the last long journey from the Lower Rhine back to the Channel: a memorable run of some 800 kilometers in all, in the course of which we passed first through the two newly recovered provinces and subsequently through no less than eight departments of France.

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IN ALSACE.

An old woman comes out of a picturesque half-timbered cottage, and is immediately accosted by a group of khaki-clad figures. "Guten Abend." (This is regarded as a rather effective display of our knowledge of the vernacular.) "'n Abend." There is a moment's faint-heartedness, and a consequent relapse into a less laborious medium of speech. "Vous parlez français, Madame?" "Verstehe nit." Nothing doing in French! "Oh, well, look here" (very slowly) "Können Sie mir sagen wo ist number drei hundert und achtzig drei? Compris?" The reply can only be described as the sort of noise one has to perpetrate when talking the language of the Boche. But our linguist is not to be daunted. "Me nix verstanden. What I want is billet—Haus—number drei—hundert—achtzig—drei." (this very painfully and deliberately, helped out with many explanatory gestures). "Dash it, I speaks deutsch, don't I? You verstanden?" This time perseverance is rewarded: the light of understanding dawns on the old woman's face. "Ach jo: drei hundert drei un' achtzig, nit?" "Aye, that's what I said! Well, where is it, anyway? Wo?" "Immer g'rad' aus," and the old woman points up the street. "Links?" "Nehr, nehr: g'rad' aus." Now, what the dickens does "g'rad' aus" mean? Never mind: we have got the direction anyway, and the old lady's intentions are evidently of the best. So with an unexceptionable "Gute Nacht" we go on our way, highly delighted with the extensive knowledge of "the lingo" that we have already acquired.

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IN ALSACE.

THE "Wirtschaft Zum Schwanen" (in plain English "The Swan Inn") is the scene of a village dance to-night: and the room on the first floor is already packed to overflowing with a throng of Alsatians, Germans and Frenchmen as we push our way in. The atmosphere is stifling. At one end the village brass band is playing some waltz tune, and to this accompaniment overheated couples are apparently deriving great enjoyment from the series of violent collisions by dint of which they are with difficulty able to canon their way round the room. Presently the music stops: the couples forthwith "process" round the room arm-in-arm, or perhaps adjourn to the bar to imbibe unlimited quantities of beer. By the time the music starts again, some of the bolder spirits amongst our number have secured partners. One of the village maidens speaks English—she was in England for some time before the war: but we can't all dance with her, so we have to try our luck with one of the others. "Bonsoir, Mademoiselle." The Alsatian lass looks up questioningly. "Engländer?" "Ja." "Sprechen Sie deutsch?" "Nein." Follows an awkward pause. But English pluck is invincible. "Voulez-vous danser, Mademoiselle?" "Tanzen?" "Ja." "Ich kann nicht tanzen." Here our cavalier trots out that invaluable conversational tag, "Das macht nichts," and next minute they are starting off down the crowded room. Others of our men are gyrating round in couples, not daring to take on a lady-partner. But the "fug" and the crush are too great to be endured for long; and as we push our way towards the door, the band itself goes on strike—for the very sound reason that no one has had the decency to offer the bandsmen a drink!

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IN ALSACE.

"IL vaut jasser les Poches, messieurs, il vaut jasser les Poches." And with the expression of these very patriotic sentiments, à propos of nothing in particular, our cicerone (an obvious Teuton himself) bids us "pon chour" and leaves us in the Kleberplatz at Strasbourg. It is getting late: but the streets are still crowded with civilians and soldiers, all the lasses wearing the national costume,—for the French Army entered the town this morning, and it is a great fête day. Mingling in the crowd are newly-liberated prisoners of war,—Frenchmen and Britishers, Serbs and Roumanians, who have found their way across the Rhine by the Kehl bridge. In their nondescript clothes they are not always recognisable in the gathering dusk. I accost a passer-by, and painfully frame what I imagine to be a German sentence: "Bitte, wollen Sie mir sagen wo ist der Münster?" The reply is startling: instead of the guttural German sounds for which we listen come the unmistakeable accents of the pure-bred Cockney,—"Oh, Oi don't understand this blinkin' lingo!" We find that our supposed *Strasbourgeois* hails from the neighbourhood of the Barking Road. Good old Canning Town! Our next venture is scarcely more successful: we have, it is true, lighted upon a *bona fide* native of the city this time; but in reply to a similar question, asked in our most engaging manner and quite unimpeachably pronounced, the man looks at us uneasily and actually has the face to reply "Ich verstehe nicht französisch." "Französisch" forsooth! [It's the limit, isn't it, Mr. N.?] And in the last resort we are driven to rely on our native wits to find our way to the car, somewhere on the outskirts of the city,—"and so home."

—N.M.J.

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CONCLVSION

At H.Q. we spent two hectic days clearing up, packing kit, etc. It is no easy thing to part with a billican which has done yeoman service night and day for anything from two to four years: to whose smoke-blackened sides cling happy memories of many a "binge" celebrated to the tuneful roar of the primus. But alas!

"things like that, you know, must be
At every famous victory."

Then there were old acquaintances to be renewed, perhaps for the last time: men to be shaken by the hand whom we hadn't seen since the early days of the Unit. Many whom we hoped to see had already gone: and the whole Unit was felt to be in a state of rapid disintegration. Five of our number went off to Boulogne on the morning of the 30th. That evening, the remnant (there were still twenty-three of us) had a farewell dinner at the "Ocean": our minds went back to a dinner held in the same room in July 1916. Many faces new since then were now to be seen amongst our number, not the least noticeable of which was the rubicund and florid countenance of one who shall be nameless: who under Dionysus' genial influence was soon dispensing smiles and laughter broadcast, like some monkish bon vivant of olden time. The formalities of demobilisation were completed the same

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night, and next morning we started out on "the last ride together." We passed through the familiar Malo gate, along the old dock-side, and out by the Calais gate: and soon were speeding along the coast-road to Boulogne. As far as Calais the road is flat and uninteresting: then comes a series of small hills, on one of which No. 70 ran out a bearing. (The driver left the bus by the road-side and came on by the next car!) Presently the Napoleon column came into view, mounting guard over the Channel: and soon we were driving down past the old citadel into Boulogne, where we left the cars in the yard of the Hôtel de France. Here we found the personnel of Ambulance Train No. 16 foregathered: we had lunch at the hotel, and then went down to the quay, where thanks to the good offices of the F.A.U. Boulogne representative we got through the passport formalities in record time. And now for Blighty!

Some fifteen of us crossed together for the last time: we were sorry to have to leave about ten of our number behind, but most of them followed in a few days' time. The crossing was uneventful: the boat-train at Folkestone was packed, and each man got in where he could. The final breaking up took place at Victoria Station: a hurried hand-shake and a "Cheery-oh!" and a community which had its roots in nearly four years of closest intimacy was dissolved.

This is not the place for sentimentalising. But it is perhaps not out of place to give some sort of expression to a feeling which was present with most, from the time when the first batch of students left the convoy on New Year's Day, right up till the last. The life "out there," in spite of the unbearable "fed-up" feeling—*le cafard*—which was never absent for long, represented for most of us a very interesting chapter in our lives: it was a time of new developments, of fresh visions, of a bigger and broader outlook than we had known in the past. Above

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all, it was a life in which one lived very near to the primitive realities of existence: in which convention counted for little, and character showed up in its unvarnished colours. In anything from two to four years of such a life, it naturally happened that associations were formed and friendships made of the most intimate nature: and there were few whose gladness at being able to return to civilian life and pick up the old threads was not mingled with a sense of very real regret that in a few months all the old *camaraderie*, the "convoy spirit," would be but a memory.

But if it is only a memory, it is a very real, a very living memory, that must count for a great deal all through the lives of those who cherish it. And in future years, when our children ask us "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" shall we not have each of us his tale to tell,—"a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney-corner."

THE END.

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A Directory containing the domiciles and occupations of the Tenants of Nos. 1—22 Buick Row and a few other detached Residences on the Châlons-sur-Vesle Estate.

No. 1.—Let to an Irishman who spent a great deal of his time with his next door neighbour but one. His partner was a man of fashion who introduced several innovations into the community, the principal ones being side-whiskers; Crown Prince type of coat-collar; and a new design in breeches, consisting in continuous strappings from the knee upwards in the front, and a corresponding number of seatings behind. He was also an elocutionist of no mean repute.

No. 2.—Occupied by the "Mon Ami" brothers, who did what was necessary to their house and no more, and were consequently men of great leisure. One was said to be a Duke; and whatever truth there may have been in the story, his partner

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was undoubtedly a card-sharper of great experience. He was generally seen in company with a large Calabash pipe, and was rumoured to be a connoisseur in Pewter Pint Pots.

No. 3.—The oldest dwelling, inhabited by the "Inseparables" who were accompanied always by their faithful dog "Boy." For inseparables, they were often long parted; for, though their neighbours' gossip could produce no authentic report of any altercation between them, yet one succeeded in breaking the other's wrist, and after eight weeks' absence the damaged partner returned and within a few days had sent the other flying though the front door onto the road, dog and all,—damaging the front of the house in so doing. Except for these incidents, they were a quiet household, and rumour had it that they kept a well-stocked larder.

No. 4.—Tenanted by Father, a very wise man who for reasons unknown lived apart from Mother, who had taken No. 11. Slow and careful in his movements and speech, he was obsessed with the idea of attaining the age of 100 years[1] and accordingly gave each mouthful the requisite number of mastications. Tales are extant of how he once kept a General waiting in a perfect deluge of shells while he carefully filled his pipe and lit same,—an action which no one else would have dared to attempt—but then age will tell. He was assisted in his household duties by a farmer's boy, as broad as he was long.

No. 5.—A professional establishment where those who wished their height increased consulted the sole occupant and had their limbs elongated free.

[1] During a fit of temporary discouragement he once attempted suicide by flinging himself into a deep moat.

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No. 6.—"The Academy of Languages," from whose portals issued strange sounds and much ribald laughter. The Professor in charge or Principal had hair which stood up on end, owing to the speed at which he drove both forwards and backwards. Rumour connected him with a society known as the Black Hand Gang.

No. 7.—Was let to a young student of Aviation, whose inventive genius was manifested by many clever labour-saving devices in and around his domicile, as well as in his keen interest in all engineering problems. Both house and tenant, alas, have gone: and though another house may be erected, we shall ever miss the cheery young student who was destined to so brilliant a future.

No. 8.—Always conspicuous by its clean outside appearance, a fact the more remarkable because the house was by day used as a Locomotive Engineering Works, while in the evening its occupants ran a sort of correspondence class lasting far into the night. This house was let on a "repairing" lease, the tenant doing practically all repairs.

No. 9.—A peculiar house, combining a rabbit-hutch and a surgery, the occupants of both hutch and surgery representing the best and latest types of their species. The dispensary attached was chiefly stocked with one type of pill, numbered in 9's or multiples thereof. One always felt sorry for the rabbit, because it appeared that it was often experimented on by the dispenser.

No. 10.—Let to a noisy couple whose interior decorations, fixtures, etc., were often marred by the continual scrapping that went on. Furniture was often seen hurtling through the window, and a bullet was frequently fired out by the door,—never, however, of the dumb-dumb type.

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No. 11.—Mother's house (lacking, however, the "roses round the door"), full of cup-boards and draught-excluding curtains, and many little gadgets appertaining to domestic comfort. It was used as a studio, and contained many interesting pictures. A good tenant who always kept her house well-garnished, and had a *penchant* for entertaining foreign gentlemen.

No. 12.—Let to a carpenter, who also ran a dry canteen: it will be seen that his was thus a prominent part. His lodger was also a man of many-sided activities, being a furrier, tent-maker, Alpine Sports Outfitter, and travelling encyclopaedia. This house was at night the haunt of gamblers and card-sharpers, being much frequented by people of that class.

No. 13.—A very quiet household, said to be run as a dancing-establishment, by one Dorothy. It was "to let" for some weeks, owing to damage caused by an artillery limber running into it.

No. 14.—Occupied by literary gentlemen, one of whom was always ready to give you the latest "Tip" with a view to making the world safe for democracy. The other alternated magazine-writing with public oratory, the latter consisting in pulling himself up to his full height and shouting out at the top of his voice his feelings of the moment. (This building was demolished by shell-fire at a later date; fortunately neither of the tenants was indoors at the time.)

No. 15.—Notorious by reason of its tenant, who shocked the neighbourhood by his proclivities for talking in his sleep. This habit was probably contracted as a result of the activities of a Debating Society, whose argumentations could be heard in this house up to a late hour of the night.

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No. 16.—"The Nursery," where the children slept both day and night.

No. 17.—At times an exceedingly noisy house, let to a man who imitated a buffoon with unqualified success. His scrapping faculties were very largely developed, and his aim with any missile was unerring—especially ration-bread. Lodging with him was the Manager of the Refuse Destructor, said to be the busiest man on the estate. His appearance in the morning was reckoned a sure sign that some speciality was being served at the communal breakfast-table.

No. 18.—"The Refectory," most ably managed from the catering point of view. Here hot meals and hot water "for shaving" could be obtained at any hour of the day or night. The properietor won some notoriety by his ability to catch trains in the dark. He was ably assisted in his work by one who had strong views (as strongly rendered in song) on drink and kissing.

No. 19.—Let to a student of Metallurgy, who had a wonderful testing-plant for finding out the strength and stresses of various steels, and was a firm believer in the theory that the working-classes should have plenty to do.

No. 20.—Tenanted by a dog-fancier and trainer, and another who performed the functions of a Gramaphone, providing a continual supply of noise from morn till night. The latter had the habit of continually asking all and sundry after their health, till at length he was besought to "change the record." At one time the occupants of this house had in the Sweep, who however did no good and only made a lot of mess, finally having to be ejected.

No. 21.—Anyone calling here was always certain of

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finding a terrific "fug" in the house, which was let to a Scotsman.

No. 22.—The home of the smallest inhabitant, who took lessons in love at regular intervals from one of the mechanics, in return for a course on Farming and Motor-Tractors. He shared rooms with a tenor-singer who "during off hours would exhibit his powers" at allotment-gardening.

The Communal Kitchen was in charge of a well-known Chef and his partner, whose specialities were Boiled Puddings and ten-course Christmas Dinners guaranteed to incapacitate even the most insatiable stomachs.

The Federal Hall was the headquarters of the Black Hand Gang, whose chief had fallen in love with a beauteous maiden, and believed all to be fair in love and war: he was ably assisted in living up to his creed by the Human Hairpin.

"Bonny Mary" Villa, a small house of artistic appearance, owned by its occupant, a man of great musical talent with an excellent repertoire. For a living he took in washing, in partnership with the Steward, a great admirer of cats and other bits of fluff. He also acted as general commission-agent for the estate.

"Overland" was an establishment for travellers needing the open-air treatment, in charge of Birdy, of the B.H.G. It was largely patronised by the Mayor and Chief Alderman when attending official and unofficial dinners in the neighbouring towns.

"Sunbeam," a seat for one, occupied at one time by its owner, and later let to the assistant-potman at "The Refectory."

The Workshop was usually surrounded by a blue haze: this was said to emanate from the interior . . . but was attributed by the occupants to the

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spasmodic coughings of their over-worked engine, which made innumerable "wheels go wound." Of the occupants themselves, one specialised in the tinsmith's art, and grew down upon his face withal: the other was fearsome to look upon, yet albeit a religious light and office-bearer at home. He was usually relieved by his brother at week-ends. Both spent their evenings in fruitful meditation and were said to have Bolshevic tendencies.

—R.P.Y.

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A MECHANICAL MEDLEY.

THOSE who look to this chapter for a mechanical survey of the various makes of car at one time or another used on the Convoy will, I am afraid, be disappointed: and for anything further than a brief outline of the pros and cons of the various cars (regarded mainly from the mechanic's point of view) I must refer them to the makers' Catalogues.

The first ambulances were Mors, with the ordinary touring-type model of chassis: and excellent as these are for the work for which they were built, they were too high-geared for ambulances, their heavy bodies collecting the wind and thus materially retarding the speed. Nominally rated at 12 H.P., their engines were a splendid example of a neat monobloc type, with few of those nooks and crannies where dirt and dust so easily accumulate. S.U. carburetters and Bosch magnetos fitted in the most accessible positions made adjustment possible without the physical contortions so often necessitated. The valves were enclosed by a quickly detachable cover, and when

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these were delicately adjusted, few engines in the Unit could compare with them for silent running. The outstanding feature of the chassis was the clutch, which was of the contracting band type, operated through bell cranks by a sliding conical still roller. These were very sweet in their action, and caused no end-thrust either in engaging or disengaging. The gear-box containing four speeds forward (and reverse) was, like the rest of the chassis, beautifully made from the highest grade material, while the internal features of the back axle were of the usual type but superbly finished. The Mors were easy to start: in fact, it was at times difficult to find where the compression was. The gear-change was simple; and the cars were well-sprung owing to the great length of the rear springs. The chief disadvantage was that the cars being under-powered and too high-geared, top-gear work against a head-wind was impossible even when running light. One other point is perhaps worthy of mention, and that is the position of the driving seat. The chassis being somewhat short for an ambulance, the body came practically flush with the dash on the stretcher side, making the driver's seat into a sort of box-office: this may have been comfortable enough for the Wee Mon, but I can imagine Rags and others getting their legs tied up amongst the gear and break levers.

Of the Argylls by which the Mors were gradually replaced, half were of the 15-30 H.P. type, and the rest 25-50 H.P.: they were delightfully easy to drive, the gear-change being almost fool-proof from the point of view of silence. Fitted with the patent Single Sleeve valves, the engines ran very quietly, owing to the absence of the "tap-tap" which is heard in all but the highest grades of poppet-valve engines. They had, however, a noise peculiar to their type but impossible to describe, while the singular beat of their exhaust was easily distinguished from that of any other car. The Argyll radiators com-

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pared favourably with those of the Buicks, and in subsequent winters with the latter I often hankered after them. I have frequently seen these radiators frozen solid—yet apparently they throve on such treatment. My own experience with the Argylls commenced when, towards the end of the hard winter of 1916-1917, after breaking a phenomenal number of back axles within a remarkably short period, S.S.A. 14 finally dumped their Argylls at Dunkerque. After the departure of the convoy, I was requested to sort out the sheep from the goats, amongst the cars that had been left. Now I am a great admirer of the Single Sleeve valve engine and a well-tuned Zenith carburetter: but a car of this type should be housed during the winter in a well-warmed garage, with access to the correct type of oil for winter running, and perhaps also to a supply of hot water for the radiator on a really cold morning. I will draw a veil over what I thought—and said—during the three days of the sorting-out process, chiefly because it would be impossible adequately to describe either: but for anyone desiring strenuous exercise for the arms and back I can strongly recommend starting up a 25-50 Argyll which has been standing in the snow for a week,—temperature well below zero—with the oiling-system supplied with French Army oil, and no hot water available even in shaving quantities. And when you have got No. 1 free enough to turn, and finally to start, go and do likewise to nineteen others! One of these cars could not be persuaded to start, for the very excellent reason that a large size "King Dick" had been left in the crank-case. This spanner first tried conclusions with one or two connecting-rods to their discomfort, though not entirely without casualties to itself: for having silenced its 25-50 H.P. engine it retired to the bottom of the sump covered in oily glory, and resembling Harry Lauder's famous stick in general outline.

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Compared with American cars, the Argylls kept in tune a great deal longer, and from the mechanic's point of view were preferable for this reason if for no other. But I wonder if the man who designed the body ever thought for a moment how the poor mechanics were to get at the gear-box or work with any degree of comfort on the clutch? The smaller model had one great fault in design, due to a simple error on the part of the works drawing-office, as the addition of four webs from the flange to the tubular axle-casing would have prevented the fracturing at the radius in which they mostly indulged at one time or another.

Buicks, after the Argylls, were harsh, noisy and slow; but, geared 6 to 1 with an engine of 22-9 (rated) H.P., they were excellent for ambulance work at the Front, though for long evacuation runs with slightly wounded cases the going was very tedious. The finish, both interior and exterior, of the engine, gear-box and back-axle was rough in comparison with S.S.A. 14's previous cars: but they had the advantage, from the mechanic's point of view, of having practically all parts accessible without moving any of the body work. The engines were fitted with overhead valves in detachable cages, operated by long tappet-rods which did not expand to the same degree as the cylinder castings when hot, and thus not only were difficult to adjust correctly, but when adjusted did not remain so for long. The ignition, lighting, and starting apparatus were combined in one neat machine, accompanied by its supplementary battery: and (with one baffling exception) these Delco sets were extraordinarily reliable. One or two cars had Dixie magnetos fitted as an afterthought over the water-pump. Every engine of all the twenty-two had to have its big-end and main-bearings taken up in the first twelve months; but in justice to the Buick engine I must record my conviction that this would not have been necessary had a supply of really high-grade

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oil been available. Re-distilled oil, which we often had to use, forms a thick grease on cold mornings after very little use, and the big-end scoops merely cut a channel in this: thus there was no proper lubrication until the engine had been running long enough to liquefy the so-called oil.

Probably everyone who has had experience with D 4 model Buicks will have noticed the terrible grind when travelling on second gear.

One imagines that the Buick designer (unlike his English contemporaries) had as a part of his duties to spend a certain amount of time in the repair-shops of the company, repairing chassis of his own design: for very few important parts were inaccessible, and it was not found necessary to dismantle half the chassis in order to tighten up one important nut. All the same, I should like to see how the said designer would lubricate the rear universal joint through the grub-screw hole provided for the purpose.

The radiators were a very weak point, and caused incessant trouble. On bad roads the seams at the bottom would open and close while running; and yet when the driver came, with tears in his eyes, to say how many times he had had to fill his radiator on a ten-kilometer trip, not a drop could he coax therefrom when the car was being inspected while stationary in the rank. Other radiators adopted the reverse method, and would pour out a continuous stream while standing, and yet would run for 100 kilometers without a sign of leakage. Fortunately "But" liked doing radiator repairs—and he got plenty of practice.

The cars were originally built for single rear wheels, and the fitting of twin wheels was a mistake. All the other Buick convoys in France eventually discarded them for single wheels. One great drawback, for work under war-conditions, was that no shoulder was turned on the axle-shafts with a retaining collar: thus whenever the

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shaft fractured there was nothing to prevent the wheel from working outwards and finally parting company altogether with the chassis. Consequently, in the case of axle breakages, the Workshop had to go to the rescue, and hitch the rear of the ambulance up with the crane, as towing in the ordinary way was impossible.

As examples of accessibility and ease of repair the following two instances will suffice. A gear-box could be taken out of the chassis and completely dismantled in one hour: while a back-axle could be removed and dismantled, a new shaft fitted, the axle re-assembled and the car put on the road again by eight hours' hard work.

The steering was operated through a split quick thread nut, and care had to be taken in erecting, otherwise one found that the wheels turned in exactly the opposite direction to that desired. The track-rod yokes were very liable to shake loose owing to vibration: this could only be cured by drilling right through yoke and tube and bolting up tight. Altogether the Buicks gave good service, but I shudder to think what would have happened had the war lasted another year. Two years would seem to be about the maximum with an American chassis over war time roads.

This chapter would be incomplete without mention of the Vulcan kitchen, Federal lorry, and Austin workshop. The first-named only moved when the whole convoy moved, and consequently gave little trouble to the workshop staff. It was a fast bus, its chief faults being a somewhat small clutch, inclined to be fierce, and a foot-brake of a decidedly fiery nature: these two features combined to make it buck in no uncertain manner when driven in convoy during a time of stress such as that of the Retreat. The Federal was old before it joined S.S.A. 14, and was a constant patient at the workshop. Play in every joint of its mechanism made driving a source of joyous excitement, which was enhanced by a

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set of very poor brakes. It went through the attack of August 1918 with its off-side steering-arm held on by a piece of iron wire, and had at length to be laid to rest in the Parc at Vitry-le-François on the final run up to Dunkerque. The Austin workshop was to those that worked in it a "home from home," and as the ambulances always had first call on our services, it was somewhat neglected from the mechanical point of view, and always much overloaded: yet until near the end it never murmured at its treatment.

R.P.Y.

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Appendix I.

Copies of Letters received from the French Authorities.

Copy of Letter received from General Putz commanding the French Army operations in the North, after the German attack at Elverdinghe, April 1915.

Mon attention a été appelée sur les précieux services au Détachement d' Armée de Belgique par la Section Sanitaire Automobile Anglaise qui lui est attachée.

Malgré le bombardement d' Elverdinghe, des routes qui y accèdent et de l' ambulance même, cette évacuation s'est effectuée nuit et jour, sans interruption, et dans d' excellentes conditions de promptitude et de régularité.

Je ne saurais trop louer le courage et le dévouement dont a fait preuve le personnel de la Section, et je vous serais obligé de vouloir bien lui transmettre mes félicitations et mes remerciments pour l' effort physique considérable qu' il a si généreusment consenti, et les signales services qu' il a rendus.

(Signé) E. Putz.

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Copy of Letter written by the MÉDECIN AIDE-MAJOR at Elverdinghe.

J'ai l' honneur de vous rendre compte que les Sections Sanitaires Automobiles Anglaises qui nous sont attachées, ont assuré avec le plus grand dévouement l' évacuation de nos blessés sur Poperinghe malgré leur nombre considérable. (Près de 3,000 en cinq jours.)

Je dois en outre signaler le courage avec lequel ils ont assuré leur service sans interruption malgré le bombardement du village d' Elverdinghe, des routes qui y donnent accès, et même du petit château où était installée l' ambulance.

Des obus étant tombés à quelques mètres de notre local, nous avons été obligés, sur l' ordre de M. Le Général de Division Quiquandon, de l' évacuer, et nous avons pu transporter rapidement nos blessés à notre nouveau local, grâce au sang-froid et au dévouement des Sections Sanitaires Anglaises.

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Copy of Letter received from GENERAL MORDACQ after the Suippes Attack, April 1917.

24e Division
Etat Major
Ier Bureau
No. 22/1/71.

P.C. le 21 Avril 1917.

Le Général H. Mordacq, Commmandant la 24e Division à Monsieur le Sous-Lieutenant Neel Commandant la S. S. Automobile Anglaise 14.

Je vous prie de transmettre à tout le personnel de la Section Sanitaire Anglaise No. 14 mes félicitations et mes remerciements pour le précieux concours qu' ils ont prêté à la 24e Division au cours des récentes attaques.

L' excellente organisation de la Section, la régularité de son service, le sang-froid et le dévouement de tous ses membres, ont permis d' assurer dans les meilleures conditions les évacuations de blessés sur une route encombrée souvent battue par le feu de l' ennemi.

Les blessés français sont reconnaissants aux camarades anglais de leur avoir porté un secours aussi rapide et aussi efficace.

(Signé) H. MORDACQ.

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Copy of Citation in Divisional Orders of the 127th Division.

127e Division
Etat-Major
Ier Bureau
No. 9222

Q.G. le 7 Novembre 1918.

ORDRE DE LA DIVISION No 279.

Le Colonel Passerieux Commandant provisoirement la 127e Division d' Infanterie cite à l' Ordre de la Division:

La Section Sanitaire Anglaise No. 14 (S.S.A. 14):

"Sous le Commandement du Lieutenant Bordes et des Officiers et Sous-Officiers anglais Milton, Leyland & Birkett, la S.S.A. 14. n' a pas cessé de faire preuve d' un dévouement parfait envers les blessés, d' une extrême endurance au feu, d' un mépris absolu du danger. Flegmatique et zélée sous les projectiles, elle constitue depuis les débuts de la guerre, par sa hardiesse à aller de l' avant, une aide extrêmement précieuse pour les blessés et un réconfort pour ceux qui la voient à l' oeuvre."

Le Colonel Passerieux Cdt. prov^{t}. la 127e D.I.

Signé: PASSERIEUX.

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Copy of Letter received from GENERAL RAMPONT January 1919.

127e Division
Etat-Major
Ier Bureau
No. 11469/1.

Au Q.G. le 9 Janvier 1919.

ORDRE GENERAL.

Au moment où finissent les hostilités le Général Commandant la 127e D.I. tient à exprimer sa complète satisfaction pour les services courageux rendus à la Division par la Section Sanitaire Anglaise S.S.A. 14.

Depuis son arrivée à la D.I. en Juillet 1918, cette Section n' a jamais hésité à se porter aux points les plus dangereusement exposés, quelles que soient les difficultés des routes et les bombardements ennemis.

Grâce à une haute notion du devoir et à un esprit de charité exemplaire, elle a réussi à sauver l'existence de nombreux soldats français.

Le Général Commandant la 127e D.I. lui addresse ses remerciements et toutes ses félicitations.

LE GENERAL RAMPONT Cdt. la 127e D.I.

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Appendix II.—Statistical Record.

Total number of kilometers run 766,863

Total number of patients carried 49,796

MONTHLY TOTALS (AMBULANCE CARS ONLY).

MONTH.	Kilometers.	Patients.	MONTH.	Kilometers.	Patients.	MONTH.	Kilometers.	Patients.
March-Dec. 1915 ..	71,500	6,000				January 1918 ..	12,774	1,267
						February ,, ..	10,254	907
January 1916 ..	10,929	808	January 1917 ..	13,703	606	March ,, ..	19,883	2,141
February ,, ..	6,313	477	February ,, ..	32,175	4,977	April ,, ..	9,424	780
March ,, ..	8,378	498	March ,, ..	28,499	7,175	May ,, ..	19,132	2,480
April ,, ..	11,284	949	April ,, ..	18,576	3,265	June ,, ..	16,827	658
May ,, ..	1,346	20	May ,, ..	10,265	691	July ,, ..	12,000	419
June ,, ..	13,945	1,160	June ,, ..	9,080	547	August ,, ..	35,226	3,076
July ,, ..	690	—	July ,, ..	8,921	380	September ,, ..	14,380	966
August ,, ..	15,037	1,179	August ,, ..	9,935	556	October ,, ..	24,785	2,185
September ,, ..	12,252	1,226	September ,, ..	13,040	826	November ,, ..	16,853	140
October ,, ..	18,092	733	October ,, ..	9,768	390	December ,, ..	6,862	442
November ,, ..	7,792	481	November ,, ..	7,484	389			
December ,, ..	11,737	499	December ,, ..	7,050	553	Total Jan.-Dec. 1918	198,400	15,461
Total Jan.-Dec. 1916	117,795	8,030	Total Jan.-Dec. 1917	168,496	20,355	January 1919 ..	15,460	150

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Appendix III.—Chronological Table.

Recording the movements of the convoy, with other events of interest in its history.

1914.

October 31—Arrival of Friends' Ambulance at Dunkerque.
December 2—First official motor ambulance work for the French Army.

1915.

March 23—S.S.A. 14 officially formed.
April 18—Attached to 45th Division (of the French Army).
April 18—Elverdinghe (Base at Poperinghe).
April 22—Second Battle of Ypres (Elverdinghe attack).
June 15—Malo-les-Bains (Dunkerque).
June 16—Cars sent to Bourbourg, Zuydcoote, Bergues, Dunkerque Station, etc.
July 1—Attached to 38th Division.
July 1—Coxyde.
December 7—Re-organisation of convoy: only Mors and Argyll cars retained: arrival of French staff.

1916.

February 18—Au repos, Malo-les-Bains.
March 17—Number of cars brought up to full strength.
March 21—Coxyde.
April 20*ff*—Attached to 29th Division.
May 1—Au repos, Malo-les-Bains.
June 1—Coxyde.
June 30—Au repos, Malo-les-Bains.
July 1-31—Mors cars replaced by Argylls.
August 1—Coxyde.
October 9—Bergues.
October 15—Convoy leaves Northern area for the Somme.
October 15—Hesdin.

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1916—*continued.*

October 16—Montreuil-sur-Brêche.
[October 18-November 6—4 cars at Breteuil.
October 17-November 4—2 cars at Froissy].
October 26—Haudivillers.
October 27—Ourcel-Maison.
November 4—Rochy-Condé.
November 8—Vaux.
December 4—St. André-Fariviller.
[November 8-December 4—2 cars at Berneuil.]
December 5—Mailly-Raineval.
December 14—Ebeillaux.
December 15—Crévecoeur-le-grand.
December 24—Grandvilliers.

1917.

January 10—Pont St. Maxence.
January 12—Attached to 120th Division.
January 12—Villers-sur-Coudun (Château de Rimberlieu).
[January 15-February 2—2 cars at Monchy-Humières.]
January 13-January 25—1 car at Marest].
January 24—Chevrières.
January 25—Blincourt.
January 28—Ressons-sur-Matz.
Feb. 2-11—Journey up to H.Q. (Dunkerque) and down again: Argylls exchanged for Buicks.
February 2—Fleurines.
February 3—Amiens.
February 4—Malo-les-Bains, Dunkerque.
February 7—Amiens.
February 8—Fleurines.
February 10—Montmirail.
February 11—Châlons-sur-Marne: Corps d' Armée work.
[February 14-April 6—2 cars at Mailly-le-camp.
February 15-April 6—1 car at Brienne.
February 15-March 31—3 cars at Troyes.
February 15-March 24—1 car at Arcis-sur-Aube.
March 8-March 20—4 cars at Laval.
March 8-March 20—2 cars at Hans.]
April 5—Attached to 24th Division.
April 5—Suippes.
[April 6-April 30—1 or 2 cars at Cuperly.]
April 17—Suippes attack (French offensive in Champagne).

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1917—*continued.*

April 28—Somme-Suippe.
[April 30-June 18—1 car at St. Rémy.]
June 19—Au repos, Vanault-le-Chatel.
July 13-14—Ferme de Piémont.
July 19—Bussy-le-Château (Relay Post of 7 cars at Suippes).
[July 19-October 7—3 cars at Cuperly.]
October 8—Romigny.
October 10—Au repos, Passy-Grigny.
[October 10-November 20—4 cars at Romigny.
October 11-November 19—2 cars at Verneuil.]
November 20—Bouleuse: Corps d' Armée work.
December 26—Attached to 157th Division.
December 26—Châlons-sur-Vesle.
[December 26-March 29, 1918—1 car with Etat-Major at Gueux.
April 28-May 21, 1918—1 car at Ambulance 5/10, Gueux.]

1918.

March 31*ff*—Bombardment of Châlons-sur-Vesle and billets.
April 11*ff*—Burning of Reims by incendiary bombardment.
May 21—En réserve, Limé.
May 27—Germans break through on the Chemin-des-Dames: beginning of the allied retirement to the Marne at Château-Thierry.
May 27—Cuiry-Housse.
May 28—Villeneuve-sur Fère.
May 29—Nesle-la-Montagne.
[Bézu-St.-Germain, 8 cars.]
May 30—Les Corbières.
[Montreuil-aux-Lions, 7 cars.]
May 31—Bécherelle (between Boitron and La Trétoire).
[Hondevilliers, 7 cars.]
June 1—Bellot (Moulin des Brûs).
June 4—St. Martin-du-Boschet.
June 5—La Rue.
June 10—Les Merchines.
June 14—Rarécourt.
[June 13-June 30—1 car at Grange Lecomte.]
June 30—Au repos, "Camp des Autos," Bois de la Cousance, Souilly.
July 8—Attached to 127th Division.

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1917—*continued.*

July 8—La Noue.
[July 15-July 20—1 car at Les Sénades.]
July 15—Last German offensive in Champagne checked at its outset: this develops into Foch's victorious counter-offensive.
July 21—Passavant.
July 27—Meaux.
July 29—Vivières (Forêt de Villers-Cotterets).
July 30—Dampleux (ditto).
August 1—Grand-Rozoy attack, followed by successive attacks up to and beyond the Vesle river.
August 2—Oulchy-le-Château.
August 3—Maast-et-Violaine.
August 9—Violaine.
August 11—En réserve, Dampleux.
August 14—Vivières (Bois d' Essarts).
August 20—La Vâche Noire and Vaux.
August 21—Tartiers attack.
August 21—Vic-sur-Aisne.
August 28—L' Isle Adam.
August 29—Au repos, Gascourt.
[August 29-September 4—1 car at Lassy.]
September 5—Château d' Hérivaux.
September 17—Soissons.
October 13—127th Division captures Laon.
October 14—Laon.
October 30—Convoy finally leaves the front
October 30—Septmonts.
November 4—Châlons-sur-Marne.
November 5—Démange-aux-Eaux.
November 6—Portieux.
November 7—Varmonzey.
[From November 7, 2 cars were attached to the Divisional Etat-Major.
From November 7, 1 or 2 cars were attached to G.B.D.]
November 11—Armistice signed.
November 15—Convoy starts on the forward move to the Rhine.
November 15—Baccarat.
[November 16-November 28—1 car attached to Escadrille B.R. 7 (Aviation).
From November 17, 1 car was attached to Etat-Major of 6e Corps d' Armée.

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1918—*continued.*

November 17—Cirey: front lines crossed.
November 18—Hartzweiler: frontier crossed into "German Lorraine."
November 19—Hengweiler.
November 21—Littenheim.
November 22 Bernolsheim.
November 24—Schirrhofen.
November 25—Oberbetschdorf: official entry of French Army into Strasbourg.
November 29—Oberhofen.
December 5—Bischweiler.
December 9—Official visit of Clemenceau and Poincaré to Strasbourg.

1919.

January 1—First batch of demobilized men leaves for England.
January 21—Departure from Alsace: 127th Division left.
January 21—Sarrebourg.
January 22—Toul.
January 23—Vitry-le-François.
January 24—Lagny.
January 26—S.S.A. 14 demobilised from French Army at O S.A., Paris.
January 27—Doullens.
January 28—Convoy arrives at H.Q., Malo-les-Bains, Dunkerque.
Jan. 30-31—Boulogne: convoy disbanded and men return to England.

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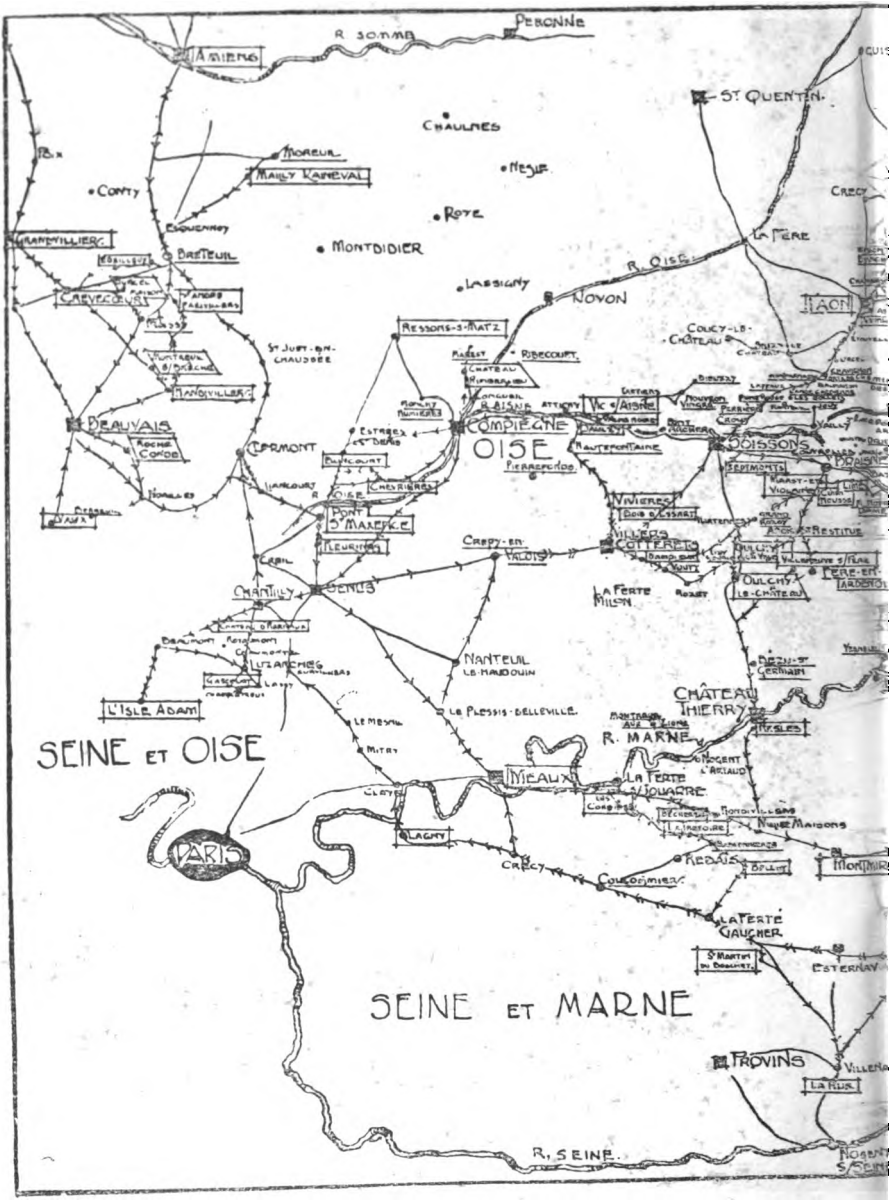

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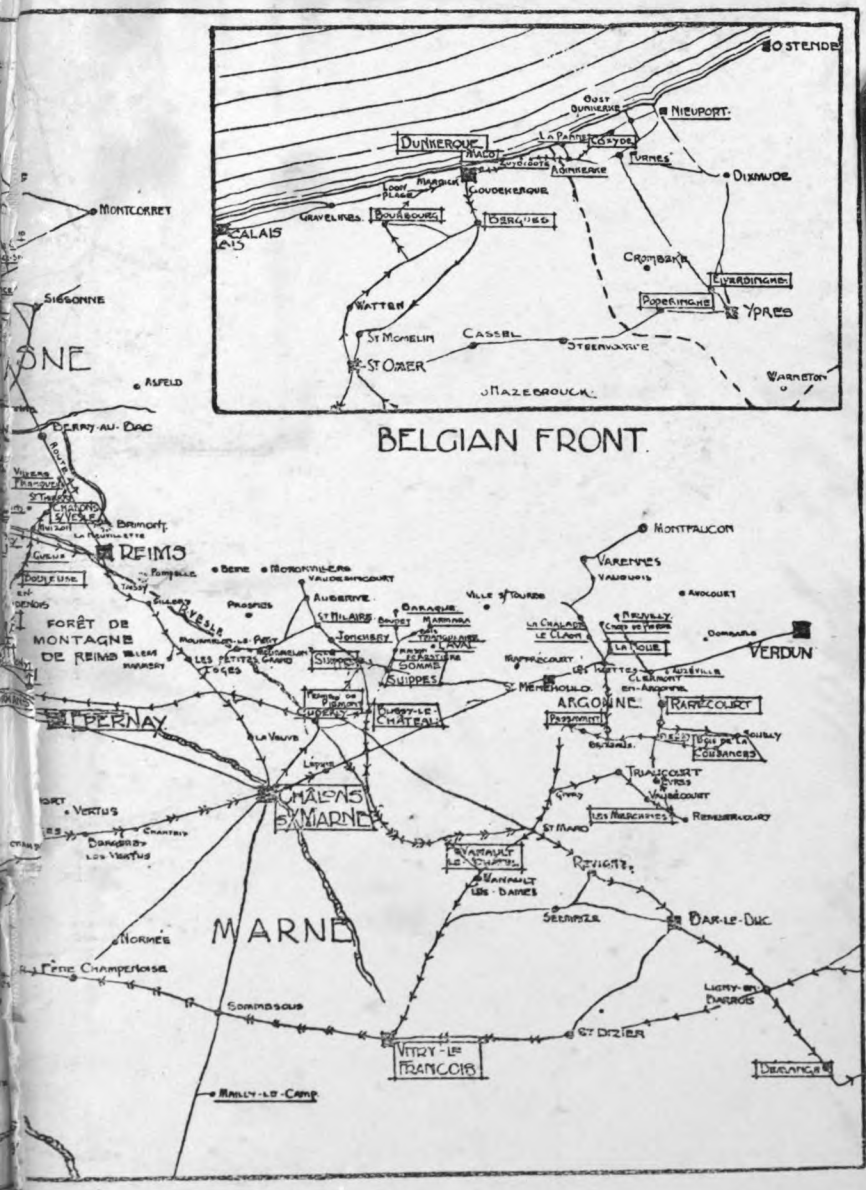

BELGIAN FRONT.

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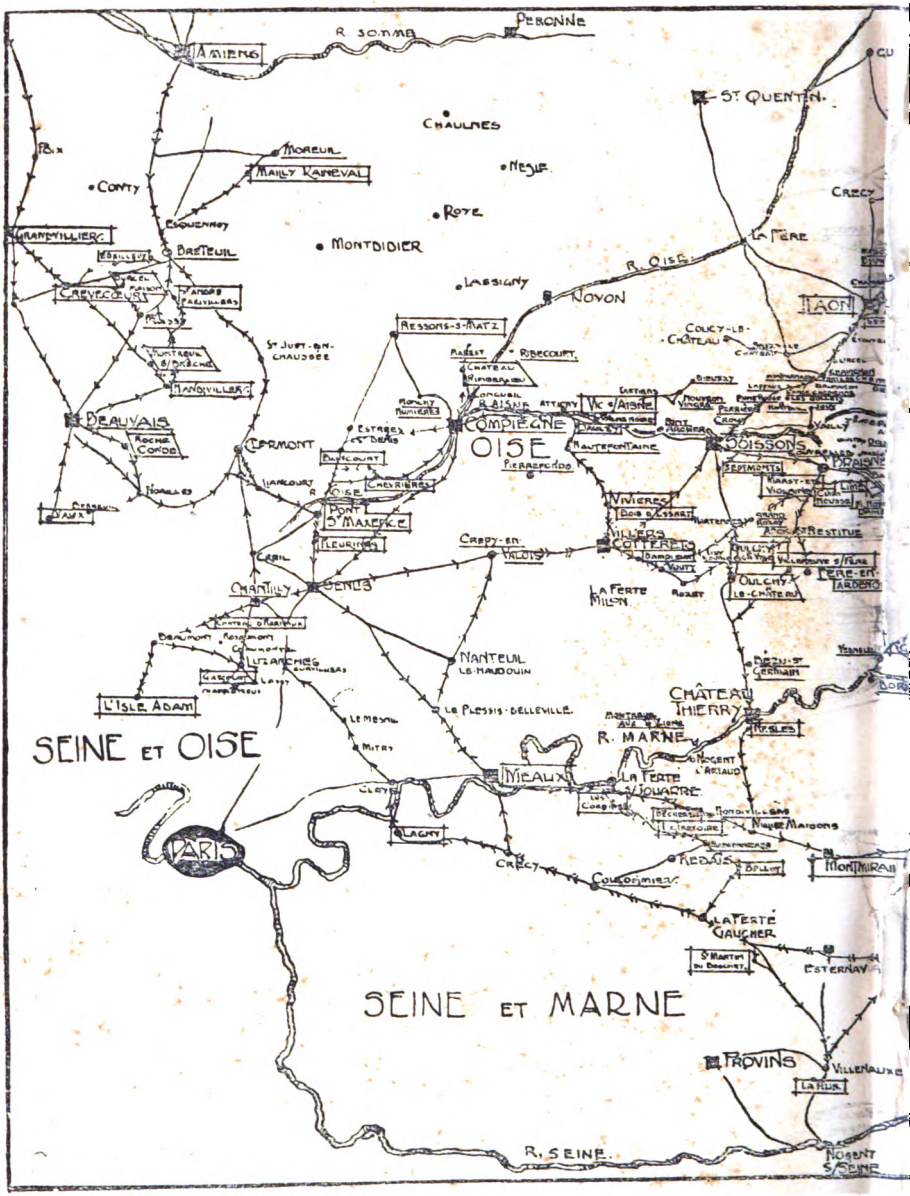

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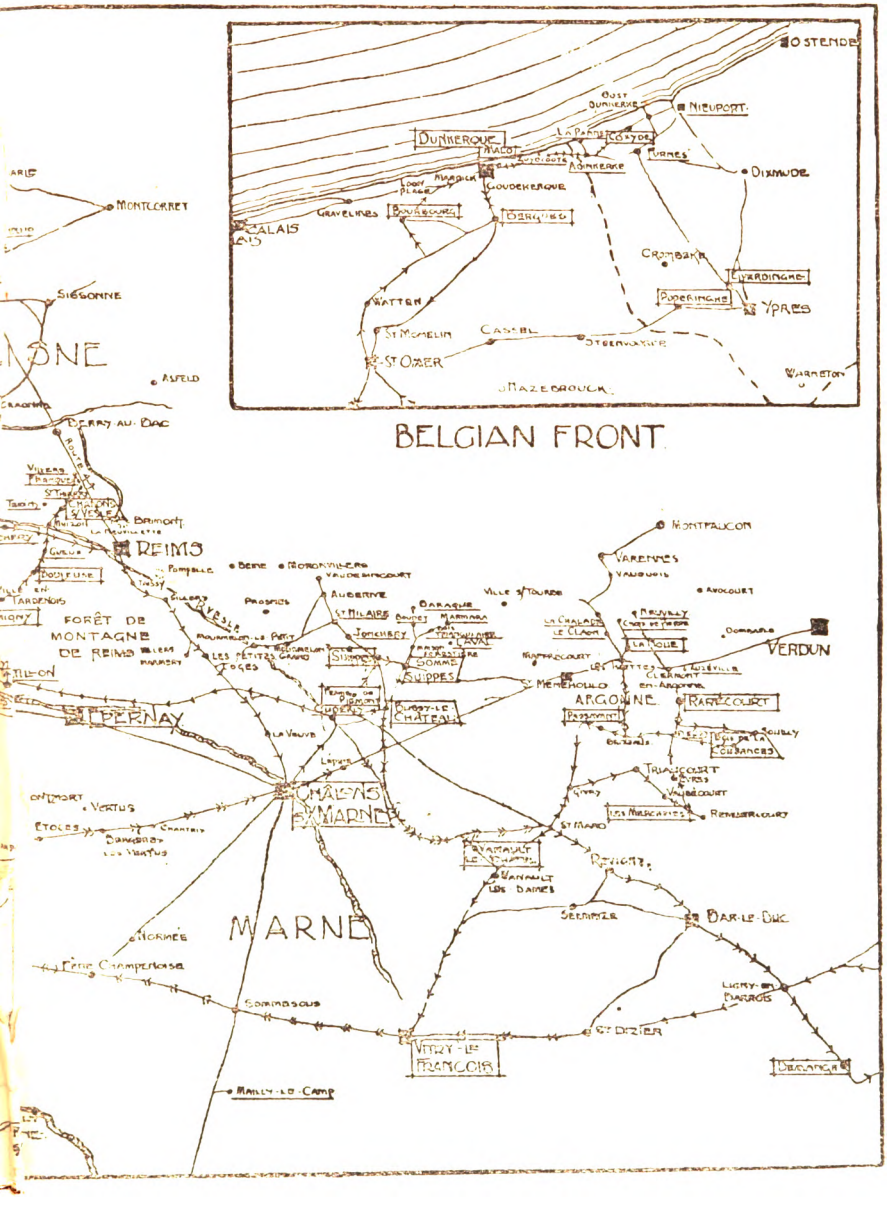

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